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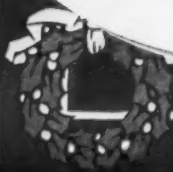
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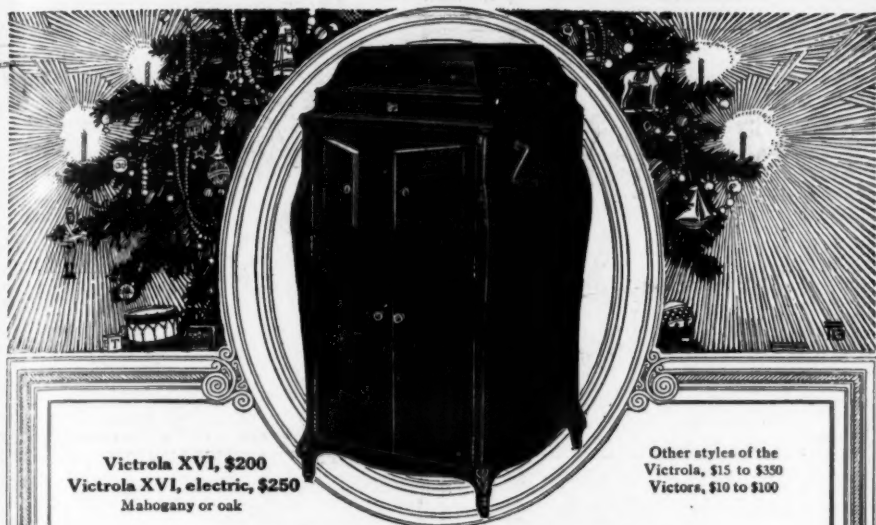


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# AINSLIE'S

*The Magazine That Entertains*

## CONTENTS

Cover Design . . . . .	Howard Chandler Christy	
Chasms. Complete Novelette . . . . .	Andrew Soutar . . . . .	1
Enbenazer Timpson's Son. Short Story . . . . .	William Almon Wolff, Jr. . . . .	30
To One Absent. Poem . . . . .	Livingston Ludlow Biddle . . . . .	39
Stories of the Super-Women. Series . . . . .	Albert Payson Terhune . . . . .	40
Madame de Montespan, the "Wild Cat" Heartbreaker.		
Ruined. Poem . . . . .	Berton Braley . . . . .	48
The Eternal Masculine. Short Story . . . . .	Flavia Rosser . . . . .	49
The Daughter Pays. Serial . . . . .	Mrs. Baillie Reynolds . . . . .	58
The Vanity Box. Series . . . . .	Joseph Ernest . . . . .	106
The Last of the Bonanzas.		
Art. Poem . . . . .	Josephine Fetter Royle . . . . .	117
The Lighted Candle. Short Story . . . . .	Alice Garland Steele . . . . .	118
The Victory. Poem . . . . .	James B. Kenyon . . . . .	128
The Flights of Francois. Series . . . . .	Victor Rousseau . . . . .	129
Alice of Chalons.		
The Winds. Poem . . . . .	Mrs. David S. Bispham . . . . .	135
A Rose Colored Day. A Short Story . . . . .	Mary Elking Braden . . . . .	136
Plays and Players. . . . .	Alan Dale . . . . .	152
For Book Lovers . . . . .		157
Talks With Ainslee's Readers . . . . .		160

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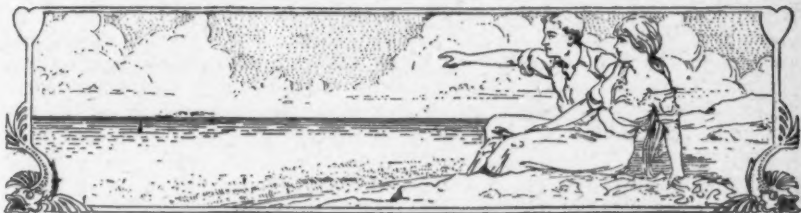


# AINSLEE'S

VOL. XXXVI.

DECEMBER, 1915.

No. 5.



## CHASMS ANDREW SOVTAR

### CHAPTER I.

**T**HE woman sitting in the bow of the boat told herself repeatedly that she was less afraid of the two natives at the oars than of the white man sitting in the stern. They had been rowing since midnight, when the *Palma* had struck, and now dawn had come. An Eastern dawn! Far down beyond the line and where the purple shadows of night were still clinging to the waters, as if reluctant to yield to the gold and orange bursting out of the east, lay Honolulu.

The two natives had rowed steadily for hours, slackening in their efforts only when the square-faced white giant in the stern gave them permission so to do. Might was right on that boat. And Micah Steele, second engineer on the ill-fated *Palma*, represented might. Thus far he had taken no share in the rowing of the boat, choosing to sit facing the native rowers, while in his right hand and swinging idly between his knees was a revolver, which had been his first thought when he had

dashed down to his cabin to save what he could of his personal belongings. There was no single feature of his that could make appeal to the woman; there was less sympathy in his hard, bitter eyes than in the shiny, oily backs of the natives. He had spoken only a few words during the night, and these had been directed at the rowers: "Hi! *Juldi kuro!*" And on these occasions the revolver would cease its swinging and come menacingly to the level.

When the *Palma* had struck the submerged wreck, she had torn a gaping wound in her side, and only a few minutes had been given to the crew to get the boats out. The woman, terrified by the seeming imminence of death, would have preferred to stay on her knees on the bridge, seeking sanctuary in the Unknown, rather than trust herself to the open sea and the company of a man like Micah Steele.

There were reasons other than his repellent features to account for this. During the voyage from Honolulu, he had not exchanged more than a glance with her, yet it was she whom he had

sought when he had come up from the engine room in his overalls, satisfied that the end of the *Palma* was near. Most of the others had already taken to the boats by the time he had lifted her and flung her across his shoulder. Indeed, only two native stokers had remained, and these he had pushed into the last boat. He had set the woman in the bow of the boat, had thrown after her the biscuits and a stone jar of water; there had been no time to break into the steward's galley. In the boat, he had discarded everything save his jumpers, flinging his oily jacket to the woman that she might cover her bare shoulders and thus protect them from the humid atmosphere of night and the scorching sun of the morrow that was to be.

He had come direct from the engine room; there was stubble on his chin, and the grime of the engines streaked his brow and temples. Where there was no grime, there was pallor, but the black marks gave him the appearance of being almost saturnine. The width of his shoulders and the depth of his chest made the figures of the two natives ridiculously puny by comparison, and the woman, watching from her seat in the bow and studying his face intently, fancied that whenever he deigned to look at the natives, there was in his eyes a contempt for their lack of stature and physique.

Not one feature to make appeal? Yes, there was one, and it fascinated her—in the black roll of disheveled hair there was a white lock that came over his forehead like a dividing line between two dark banks.

The gold and the orange of the sky changed kaleidoscopically; the sun climbed above the horizon with a rapidity that made Micah Steele tighten his lips and glance anxiously at the woman. The rowers murmured: "Tired, sahib," and he nodded indulgently that they might rest on their oars.

"The tide's taking us along at about six knots," he said gruffly. "Let her drift."

Brilliant sprays of diamond dust shot upward to the zenith; the blue of the sky, westward, was paling almost to whiteness—that hard, merciless whiteness that glazes the sea, making of it a mirror in which one can see one's own ghost. The woman looked across at Micah Steele, and although there was no request in her eyes, he understood the parted lips. And the two natives also were making signs that great thirst was upon them. Steele took the stone jar out of the locker and removed the cork.

"Mem-sahib first," he said, and handed the jar over the heads of the natives.

For the first time she saw their faces, for the craving was so intense that they turned their heads enviously to watch her drink. Micah Steele said:

"There is no pannikin." Then, as an afterthought, and grudgingly: "I am sorry."

She had accepted his oily jacket with the gesture of one who felt that only a natural tribute had been paid to her sex—that only common chivalry had been exercised. She accepted the jar in the same spirit. It was a two-gallon jar, and one of the natives had to raise it for her, so that she could drink from the neck of the bottle.

Micah Steele counted as she drank, as the life-giving water gurgled grudgingly from the neck: "One—two—three—four! Stop!"

She lowered the bottle, and there was resentment in her eyes. How dare he dictate to her, a woman, how much water she should drink? Even if they had only another day to live, she was not going to show weakness; she was not going to allow him to dominate her. She made a gesture as if she would lift the bottle again, but Micah Steele reached across and took it from her.

"We're well out of the 'trades,'" he said sternly, "and our chances of being picked up are not great. That water is all that we have to depend on." Whereupon, he raised it to his own lips.

And she, in biting irony, chanted: "One—two—three—four! Stop!"

He smiled grimly as he lowered the jar. He gave to the natives each a drink, and she, still watching the expression on his face, believed that he begrudged the men the water.

"He's a brute," she muttered to herself.

When the natives had taken their swig, Micah Steele recorked the bottle and sat back in the stern of the boat.

"I reckon," he said, addressing himself to her, although she showed him by a droop of the eyelids that she had no desire to enter into any conversation with him, "I reckon it will last two days, if we go slowly."

The rays from the midday sun shot straight downward, and her bronze hair, flowing over her shoulders, took to itself a tinge almost of magenta. Elma Raybourne was a woman of twenty-five, the daughter of Ambrose Raybourne, who had risen out of obscurity to be one of the ironmasters of Philadelphia. In truth, her temperament was very similar to that of the ill-favored Englishman in the stern. There was the same reluctance to acknowledge the authority of others; the same grim determination to be regarded as an equal; the same strong mind that could accept circumstances and make allowance for them, and yet preserve a natural dignity.

"It will be hotter still an hour after midday," he said to her, "and there is always danger of sunstroke. Take off the jacket and hang it over your head like a hood. It won't be so pleasant, I know, but it's safer."

"I had thought of that myself," she

said, still refusing to allow him to dictate.

She removed the jacket from her shoulders and placed it over her head as he had suggested. The thin green silk dinner gown that she had been wearing when the *Palma* struck looked pathetically artificial as she sat there. Already the burning sun had browned her bosom; her eyes were blinking in the glare.

During the afternoon they drank, each of them, twice from the jar. And Elma noticed that when Micah Steele took it from the second native, he shook it as if guessing at the quantity remaining; at the same time, he stared hard at the natives, and his lips moved slightly. Once he opened the breach of his revolver, as if to satisfy himself that the chambers held their bullets. And with a little quickening of the breath, she asked herself what was likely to happen, and who was to aid her, if the brute beast in the man should urge upon him the desire for life at the expense of the others in the boat. And the moment after she had whispered that to herself, she felt ashamed, because in the darkness of the previous night she had believed that she had convinced herself that there was beauty in the surrendering of one's life and soul when circumstances made it apparent that the end was near; she had believed that she had assimilated the noblest of all courage—the courage that leads one to smile defiantly at death, confident that behind the phantom there is a recompense—sanctuary.

He had just put down the stone jar after shaking it tentatively. The natives had been rowing leisurely for an hour. Now they dropped their oars; the one nearest Steele said, not whinily, but threateningly: "*Pani, sahib.*" At the same time, he stood up in the boat. The man's tongue was hanging out; it was black, and, as he rose from

his knees, he swayed from side to side, rocking the boat dangerously.

Micah Steele said: "Sit down—you fool!" and leveled the revolver. Elma screamed faintly. The native stepped or stumbled toward the jar. There was a harsh, grating sound that echoed but slightly, and then fell flat and dead on the water. Steele had not risen from his seat; his feet were far apart in order to counteract the rocking of the boat. He had not fired with the revolver, but he had struck, hard and true, with his heavy fist at the jaw of the half-insane native.

"Hold tight!" Steele shouted to the woman, as the native fell over the side, and as he sought to swing his own body to the opposite side and so straighten the boat, the native struck the water with the sound of a log of wood falling on the bosom of a placid lake. Elma shut her eyes, but she could not shut out of her ears the snap! snap! and the swish of that something that seemed to have been following the boat slowly, stealthily, cunningly, waiting for the moment when Steele should strike. A minute passed, then slowly she began to take away her fingers from her eyes, only to find that Micah Steele's were fixed on her face.

"Keep your eyes shut!" he said harshly. Then to the remaining native: "Pull, and pull hard!"

When at last Elma recovered her nerves sufficiently to drop her hands and look at the wake of the boat, she fancied—only fancied—that a thin red streak lay on the blue, far back. The remaining native, his face all quivering with terror, whispered over his shoulder:

"Shark, mem-sahib."

She said, "Ugh!" and felt cold as death. And in her heart hatred of the man in the stern was quickened.

Micah Steele said, "One less to drink," and laughed as she shuddered.

Late afternoon; then the sun went down as swiftly as it had arisen—went down like a great ball of fire that had lost its hold on the heavens; dropped as if, having matched its power against the lives in that boat, it realized its inability to master. And the whitish-blue of the sea changed to a deep ultramarine, seemed like a living thing that had sweltered long in the blazing heat and was turning over to the cool winds of the coming night. In the western sky, low down on the horizon, crimson, gold, and amber fought in rivalry, and, fighting, blended; and purple came out of the gathering shadows in the east, a long, caressing arm of purple that fondled the gold and the amber. Then change again, and the gold lost its brilliancy and yielded itself up to the amber, and the amber in turn melted into the purple.

Night came.

## CHAPTER II.

Another dawn, heralded by a silvery-gray mist that bespoke greater heat than that of yesterday. Micah Steele had not slept; he was one of those men who seem able to go on forever without sleep. Elma opened her eyes with a start, betraying to the observant Micah the dreams by which she had been tormented.

"Still here," she murmured.

"Still drifting," said Micah Steele. "But the current is running faster. There is a little more hope."

"Of what?" she asked in the tone of one trying to forget the coldness of yesterday's attitude, and in the passionless voice of one accustomed to ask questions of subordinates.

"This current," he said, "may take us somewhere into a deeper channel, and deeper channels suggest to my mind subterranean volcanic action. There is an archipelago somewhere here."

"You know the waters?"



"Years ago," he answered laconically. "When I was a young man."

She could not suppress a smile, for no more than thirty years had passed over his head. He read what was in her mind.

"Some men," he said a trifle cynically, "are old at thirty. Some women are children all their lives."

She made no comment. The native was looking at the stone jar. It was time for the first ration of the day, and Micah, following the man's look, shook his head, saying:

"Not yet—not until the sun is well up. You must learn to curb your thirst."

Then, before Elma could define the situation, the native behaved in an extraordinary manner. He dropped the oars, rose to his feet, held out his hands to the east, crying: "Allah! Allah!" and dived overboard.

This time it was Micah Steele's turn to be startled. For all that Elma said as the thick, still waters closed over the black form was this: "Poor fellow—insane." Micah looked at her curiously, as if for a moment he doubted her sanity, but when she said, "Shall I take the oars?" he drew a deep breath as of relief.

"No, but I should like you to sit in the stern," he said, and assisted her over the seats.

The oily jacket that she had used as a covering for her head and shoulders fell to the bottom of the boat as she was stepping into her new place, and he picked it up. As she seated herself, she held out her hand for the thing, but he appeared not to have seen the action, and proceeded to place it over her head. She drew back her hand quickly, and allowed him to perform the little act of kindness without displaying any of the petulance that he might have expected. Then he took his seat and began to row.

Silence fell upon them, and the sun,

flashing across the waste of water, focused on him as he sat there, bending to and fro in the action of rowing. Physical strength always makes its appeal to the feminine mind; that is the philosophy of the primitive, but even in your modern woman something of the primitive remains. The magnificent throw of his head, the powerful stretch of his shoulders, the splendid molding of his biceps, gave Elma, no matter how hard she tried to resist the idea, a certain sense of security. The strain, the terrible hours that had elapsed since the sinking of the *Palma*, had weakened her, and in highly intelligent women such a strain inevitably tends to fanciful workings of the brain. The water, long and low and lonely, seemed to lose its terrors for her. In Micah Steele she saw a force that was even greater than the water.

He took no notice of her for fully an hour, but bent and swayed to the oars, pausing now and then in his exertions to put his hand over the gunwale and test the speed of the tide. At the end of the hour, he pushed the stone jar toward her, saying:

"I will let you drink longer now."

The assigning to himself of the right to say how much she should drink brought back the old spirit of resentment. She said:

"Since I was the unprotesting witness of the murder of that man yesterday, my sin was as great as yours in the sight of God. And since I have sinned, I have a right to regard half the booty as mine. I shall drink when and how much I like."

For reply he drew in the oars and sat there regarding her intently, if not sneeringly. She could see the muscles of his arms twitching by a trick of the fingers, and she interpreted it as a threat.

"Why do you make me hate you?" she asked in a whisper.

"I was not aware that you did hate

me," he said quietly. "Not that it would make very much difference."

Her hand was on the stone jar, but she took it away with a sudden jerk.

"Ugh!" she said sharply. "I can't drink it. I should feel as if I were drinking a man's lifeblood. You killed that man because——"

"Because he would have killed me if he could have managed it," he said.

"He only wanted a drink, and he had been rowing all night. You had not even offered to take an oar."

His eyes were half closed as he replied:

"If I had allowed myself to be overcome by sentiment—allowed myself to come down to the level of a native, then I might have had to row at their dictation. And supposing they had gained possession of the revolver—what about you?"

"Even they were not without chivalry," she said. "I wasn't afraid of them."

"You are afraid of me?"

"Afraid! I am not!"

"Then why do you hate me? One never hates unless one fears."

"I hate you," she said, "because—because you are hateful."

"You had better drink," he told her.

"There's plenty of water to-day. It may be a little warm, and I would sling it over the side and tow it along under the water to keep it cool, only there's always a risk. And we daren't take risks just now. Drink!"

"On one condition," she said proudly. "I will drink if you drink. I am not going to be treated as if I were dependent on you."

"If you value your life," he said quietly, "you must admit that you are dependent on me. I don't think that you are so courageous—— No, I won't put it like that. Let me say that you are not so tired of life that you would willingly sacrifice it at a moment when there was a glimmer of

hope. I think you had better drink, because I want water. No, after you."

Her throat was parched, and she made no more ado, but raised the heavy stone jar to the seat, tilted it, and drank. Then he, in turn, lifted the thing and set his lips to the mouth. The water gave her the strength for which she had been secretly praying, and, strength coming to her, she regretted her hasty words. She said to him:

"Do you really believe that there is a chance of our being picked up?"

"It's not for me to say," he answered.

"We ought to be somewhere near that archipelago, unless I am very much out of my reckoning. But I ought to remind you that on board the *Palma* there was a crowd of men and women who deserved all that has come to them. I believe they got away in the boats. I don't know—I don't care. The world will not miss them if they went down. I ought to remind you, as I said just now, that the yacht was fully a hundred miles out of her course when she struck that derelict. I had that from the second officer."

"Whose mistake was that?" she asked, biting at her nether lip.

"Everybody's," he replied. "The mistake or the fault of the painted crowd who filled the captain up with champagne and danced and flitted about the decks like a swarm of butterflies in the sun. The mistake and fault of the captain for allowing them to drink; the crew's mistake—my mistake—for allowing ourselves to ship with a crowd who had only one aim in life—pleasure."

She covered her eyes with her hands, and was buried in thought for a long while. Then she said:

"If I thought we were going to drift on like this for another day or two, and then die of thirst, I would take the leap now while I have strength."

"I didn't think you were a coward,"



he said, "although you are his daughter."

"Go on rowing," she said brusquely. Her temper was rising.

At midday they drank again and nibbled a biscuit. The heat and the craving for a longer drink than she deemed it in keeping with her dignity to take began to torment her brain.

Watching her, he said: "I'll let you have more water if you wish it."

"Who are you to dictate?" she cried.

"I am the man on this boat," he said, "and it is my duty to regulate the water and rations. If you don't want a drink, we'll say no more about it. I'll go on rowing."

"I won't tell you whether I want it or not," she said. "If you haven't the chivalry, the manliness, the courtliness, to offer me water, I will go without it."

"I offered it to you," he said, scowling. "You remind me of a petty child. Last night I was beginning to admire you."

"I'm not flattered."

"No, I don't think you are," he said. "But it's true. I was beginning to admire you. This morning— Well, you make me repeat myself—some women are children all their lives. There's not much water left. It may be twelve, twenty-four, or forty-eight hours before we strike land—that is, if I'm not out of my reckoning. There's enough water to keep us alive, if we take it gently and in small doses. I've seen men die of thirst, and I don't want to see a woman. Women rave and tear their hair, and rock the boat, and make it necessary for men who happen to be in the boat—make it necessary for those men to be very brutal."

She set her lips; and sat back in the stern.

"I shall not drink again," she said, "until you ask me."

"Very well, madam," said Micah Steele.

An hour—and she could feel her

tongue swelling. A mist came over her eyes; the sea, to right and left of her, assumed the color of blood in which were myriads of black specks. He was rowing steadily, and the "splash" and "seech" of the oars made her feel that she wanted to thrust her fingers into her ears, for the noise was harder to bear than the thirst.

Then he uncorked the jar and raised it to his lips. She watched him with something in her throat that threatened to choke her. Her poor dry tongue peeped plaintively from her cracked and swollen lips. If he had looked at her, he would have seen by her twitching face how great was the fight to suppress that which was in her throat. He pushed the jar back in the locker and prepared to take up the oars. She bit down her pride, though it cost her more than he would ever know, and said brokenly:

"For God's sake give me some—please!"

Without a word he took the jar from the locker, and, standing in the boat, held it for her so that she might drink. It was good. As it trickled down her burning throat, it seemed sweeter than anything she had ever tasted in life. It was as if the very heavens themselves had opened and given her of their best. So great was the relief, so great the delight and the satisfaction, that, having drunk, she fell back and closed her eyes, murmuring very softly, "Thank you."

Surely this man had the strength of ten, for the oars rose and fell like machine-driven flails, and yet on his brow there was not a single diamond point of sweat, nor had his eyes the faintest suggestion of fatigue. He did not speak again for a long while. When she wanted water, she asked for it, and on each occasion he drank after her. She slept a little during the afternoon, and that sleep soothed her immeasurably—so much so that she was

able to collect her thoughts and make deductions.

She began to rehearse a speech of entreaty for that moment when there should remain in the jar only one more mouthful of water. She began to think of all the pretty little efforts at cajolery she had made in the past; she began, in fact, a plan of campaign against this giant of a man, considering and weighing carefully every phase in his character with which she was acquainted—his weaknesses, sentiment, and so forth.

Toward evening, he dropped his oars and pointed to the north. For a long while she could not see anything, but when he whispered, "Land!" and guided her vision with his finger, she saw it clearly, jutting out of the blue like a needle's point out of a tarpaulin.

"Twenty-four hours," he said, and he said it in such a way that she looked at him sharply. It was spoken thickly, as if he had been drinking spirits.

She offered to take an oar with him, but he shook his head.

Presently he began to talk, and, to her horror, it was in a rambling manner. She crouched in the stern of the boat, gazing at him in dumb amazement. He was still rowing, but listlessly. And into his eyes had come a pinpoint of red light.

"Twenty-four hours," he mumbled again; then dived for the jar of water—dived, but never reached it. For her right hand had touched something that he had left behind in the stern—the revolver. She leveled it at his head, saying:

"I will shoot if you touch it. You have had your share. Go back to your seat!"

There was real fear in his face as he went back to the oars and tried to resume the rowing. She sat there, still pointing the revolver, until he fell forward in a faint. She screamed when he fell, head toward the stern;

then, buoyed up by a belief that she could reach the shore, she stepped over his prostrate body, and, seizing the oars, rowed with all her strength.

Half a mile from the beach of a small island, she felt her own strength give out. Night had come, and with it a cloud. All of a sudden a raindrop splashed down through the darkness—splashed full on her forehead. She cried out, "God be thanked!" and so great was her ecstasy that she drew in the oars, felt for the stone jar, lifted Micah Steele's head, and forced the mouth of the bottle between his swollen lips.

"You may have it now," she cried. "Wake up! We are nearly on the beach. You may drink as deeply as you like."

He woke up as the water trickled down his throat, but was too weak to help her drag the boat up the beach. Indeed, she had to assist him to drag his legs after him. High up, and in one of the many caves, he lay down and shut his eyes. She sat down and watched him.

"I know," she whispered to herself, "that I might have saved him this by giving him the water when he tried to get it. But might is right, even as he said, and, after all, he had been given his fair share."

And Elma Raybourne never knew that for nearly thirty-six hours Micah Steele had rowed without touching water. He had feared that it would not last her needs, and every time he had raised the jar to his lips—every time he had nodded his head in satisfaction after replacing the cork—she never knew that all this had been pretense.

### CHAPTER III.

There was a lazy note in the song of the night. The sea brushed the fringe of the track with the delicacy of a devoted maid brushing the hair

of an invalid mistress. Behind the broken coast line, with its countless caves, cicada hummed in the tropical foliage, the silver moon hanging low as if to light them in their concert.

Micah Steele was still weak from his labors and self-denial, but the power to command remained.

"We'll pass the night in the caves," he said, without looking at her. "And at daybreak we can take a sprint round the island."

She hesitated. He had spoken so easily, so carelessly, that the suspicions flooding into her mind seemed base and unworthy the second after they had been conceived.

"There is more than *one* cave," he added abruptly, as if her silence had stung him.

She stepped forward a pace, then stopped.

"There may be a fishing village on the island," she ventured.

"There may be and there may not be. I'm going to look for a couple of caves that don't stand a chance of being overrun by the tide before morning."

"We ought to look for any village that might be here."

He turned slowly on his heel.

"I'm satisfied with the caves," he said.

Her love of independence was great.

"You'll need this." And she handed him his engine-room jacket.

He waved it back.

"Best make a pillow of it," he said, and strode forward, leaving her to follow if she chose to do so.

"Beast!" she muttered beneath her breath.

But she followed, nevertheless. The revolver was in her corsage.

He selected two of the caves that ran in a long, unbroken series as far as the angle of the coast. There were five or six between the two he selected.

"The tide doesn't reach them," he

said to her, "so you may sleep in peace."

As if the incoming tide were the only danger that threatened her!

He inspected the interior of one cave before allowing her to set foot within it. When he emerged and came to where she was standing, he said, with a touch of irony in his voice:

"There's no feather bed, no eider-down, and no music to waft you to sleep, but if you have any imagination, you'll get greater comfort out of the sand and sweeter music from the sea. It's a grand night."

He walked away without another word, and she watched him till he disappeared within a cave some distance away.

She had believed herself possessed of greater courage than actually came to her in the half hour after his departure. The interior of the cave was very dark, and when she stirred a foot, the noise was deep and hollow. He had left her as easily as if he had been leaving her at the door of her apartment in a well-appointed hotel. She believed in the sincerity of the action. Well—did she? If so, why did she tie the revolver to her right hand—tie it with a strip of silk torn from the hem of her green dinner gown?

Oh, the lazy, sensuous tropical night, with no stars and the moon low down, the dark sea heaving to meet them, the perfume of cinnamon and musk filling the atmosphere! Low and sadly, the waves sang to her; and the adventures through which she had passed faded out of her mind. The screaming of the terrified passengers as the *Palma* went to the bottom was forgotten; the terror that had struck into her heart when the two natives went out of the boat gave place to a feeling of peace and thankfulness for deliverance.

She thought of her father, Ambrose Raybourne, ironmaster, and tried to

imagine his state of mind when he should learn of the loss of the *Palma*. Raybourne had stayed behind in Honolulu, handing over the yacht to the crowd of sycophants ever dancing attendance upon him. Mabberly Todd, his junior partner, had been in charge of the party, and it had been at his solicitation that Elma had accompanied the guests.

Mabberly Todd had addressed poetry to the bronze strands which the brutal Micah had not deigned to notice; he had searched libraries for grandiloquence that would prove his idolatry. Micah had spoken to her as if unaware of her sex and unacquainted with the commonest courtesies due to women. And yet—there was no great chasm between her regard for one and the other. She had said that she hated Micah. She did more; she had been courageous enough to tell him so. She despised Mabberly Todd for his effeminacy.

She had almost fallen asleep. It was the cracking of a pebble on the beach that startled her to a sitting posture and changed that hatred afore-said into—into loathing!

He came nearer. She could hear the soft pad of bare feet on the sand. Then a pause as if he were listening.

His figure filled the entrance to the cave. Elma raised the revolver and fired blindly. Then she fell back against the farther wall, horror gripping her. The acrid smell of powder poisoned her nostrils. She could scarcely distinguish him, though she knew he was still on his feet at the entrance. He spoke:

"Sorry if you were asleep. I brought you some dry seaweed. Doesn't make half a bad shakedown. Good night."

He went away. She could hear his footsteps on the hard sand. After a while, she crept to the mouth of the cave and found there a pile of seaweed. She sobbed a little as she car-

ried it inside, and she gasped for breath while forming a couch, for some of the seaweed was *wet* and *warm*.

When she awoke in the morning, there was a dark-red stain on the hem of her green silk gown. And when Micah Steele came sauntering along the beach to give her a curt "good morning," she saw that his left forearm was bandaged with a strip of dirty calico.

She said nothing.

#### CHAPTER IV.

"I've found the cache," he said, with surprising calm. "It's round the headland, yonder, to the west. If you're ready, we'll get along to it, and you can make the breakfast."

Again that rebellious pride that refused to submit to his dictatorial manner.

"You were not able to make breakfast for yourself, I suppose?"

He gave her a steady look.

"No," he said tonelessly. "I hadn't the time, as I wanted to do a little exploring before the sun was high. Besides, it's a woman's work."

"I wish you would try to remember that I am a woman. I wish"—the tears started to her eyes—"I wish you would bring yourself to think of all that I've passed through during the last few days. I wish——"

"I wish you'd hurry along. I'm hungry," he said coldly.

She went with him. Neither spoke until a hundred yards or more had been covered. Then he said to her—without any inflection of the voice that might suggest penitence:

"During the last forty-eight hours I've said to myself, over and over again, that you're different from any woman I've ever met. There was nothing like hysterics when the niggers went overboard, and you showed a fine spirit of independence afterward. I've

been busy killing a lot of thoughts I used to entertain toward you. I hope you don't want me to resurrect them. There!" He faced her. "That's more than I've said to any other woman."

"You said you were hungry." She gave a sharp breath. "Shall we hurry?"

When she reached the cache, she found that he had opened a tin of preserved meat and one of biscuits. There was a pailful of water standing in readiness, a wood fire was burning just outside the cave, and newly caught fish were awaiting a chef or a cook.

"Will you explain?" She had softened her voice.

"There's not much to explain. It's just an ordinary cache, equipped by pearl traders, I should say, against the time when they might have to drop anchor close in to hide from the storm. They're to be found on most islands in the Pacific."

She colored with new hopes.

"Pearl traders! Then we are not so remote from civilization as I feared."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I wouldn't get into the habit of developing new hopes at every turn," he said. "Hopes and disappointments are twin sisters."

She swung angrily toward him.

"But you don't suppose I'm going to stay here long, do you?"

He smiled pityingly.

"Now you are getting hysterical," he said, adding unsympathetically: "When are you going to cook that fish?"

She went about the task, while he lay in the shade, his arms folded beneath his head. When breakfast was ready, she apprised him of the fact by tapping with a knife on the tin platter. They ate in silence for a moment; then suddenly she flung down her knife, and, clenching her hands, cried bitterly:

"It's horrible! Horrible! Why

should this have happened to me? Why should I have been thrown on this island with you—you of all people? Never in my life have I done a wicked thing, and yet——"

She burst into a fit of weeping. He went on with his breakfast, after saying reproachfully:

"You haven't even thanked God for your food."

An hour later, she went to where he was sitting in the shade, and remained standing a few feet from him. Without raising his eyes he said: "Well?"

She took a firmer hold of herself, and began:

"I told you that I hated you——"

"Have you cleaned up the dishes? We shall need them again."

"——and I'm not going to apologize, but——"

"If you've made the cache shipshape, we'll take a turn inland. There's a lagoon about——"

"I won't be put off. I'm not going to apologize, but I'm ready to tell you that I believe you're man enough to pity my position."

He raised his eyelids slowly.

"I don't quite get your meaning," he said, and his forehead was ruffled.

She gulped down a sob of despair.

"We're alone on this island, I believe?"

He arched his brows.

"I'm certain of it."

"And we may have to stay here for an indefinite period?"

He did not reply for a moment; then: "Suppose we do?"

"We must come to some understanding."

"To me, everything is as plain as daylight." Apparently he was going to refuse to be drawn into any serious discussion.

"But I want it to be clear to both of us," she said. "I've asked you already not to treat me as if I were a



child. I'm a woman and capable of defending myself. I've passed through enough during the last day or two to turn the mind of an average woman."

"That's it," he said dryly. "But you are not an average woman. You're different from the rest. If you had been an average woman, I don't think we should be sitting here talking like this—talking as if we were sitting in a drawing-room at home, instead of on a God-forsaken reef somewhere in the South Pacific—on a reef thousands of miles away from anybody—alone—you and I."

He looked at her from under his bushy eyebrows, not insinuatingly, not with the slightest suspicion of a leer, but in such a way that she felt the blood rush to her temples.

She presented a dramatic figure as she stood there facing him—the grayish-white caves for a background, the shimmering sea on her left. The pale-green dinner gown took to itself a world of pathos in the garish light of day. Her bronze hair flowed over her shoulders as if it would clothe the modest white neck and bosom. Her feet were bare, for her first precaution, when the *Palma* struck, had been to kick off her shoes, light though they were. The train of the green silk gown had dragged through the surf, and it was torn in places. Yet as he looked at her standing there, a shadow crossed his face, a shadow almost of shame. Never had he seen her so beautiful, so dignified.

She repeated those words of his in a breaking whisper:

"On a God-forsaken reef—thousands of miles away from anybody." She stopped, and he saw the sob breaking in her throat. "Does that make any difference to your sense of honor?" she asked. "Must I think that a woman is only protected by circumstances—by a crowded room—by the presence of friends? Do you want me

to believe that in the world from which we have drifted, you were only a hypocrite, and that here on this lonely reef, might, to use your own words, is right?"

He did not speak for a few minutes. His eyes were downcast, and the fingers of his right hand played foolishly with pebbles. Suddenly he rose to his feet and looked her squarely in the face.

"You think too quickly," he said. "That's your great trouble. Have I said or done anything since we quitted the *Palma* that makes me less of a man in your eyes?"

"No," she said, eagerly believing that she had touched the right chord in his nature. "You haven't, and I beg your pardon for suggesting—"

"I would rather that you didn't ask my pardon," he said coldly. "You are going to apologize, and an apology, so I have read, is only a lie told at the expense of one's feelings. Although I have not said or done anything that I should have been ashamed to say or do in Philadelphia, you have had it in your mind all the while that I was keeping something back. What understanding do you want me to come to?" She did not reply, but he could see her bosom heaving and falling, and her eyes glistening. "If you are not prepared with your ideas," he said, "don't say anything more about it until we have had a look around the island."

She asked him in a whisper: "Do you think there is any hope of our being picked off soon?"

He looked at her from the corner of his eye.

"Why?" he asked, in turn. "If you thought that we should be picked off in a few hours' time, you wouldn't suggest any arrangement—is that it? You would still go on thinking that I was a blackguard?"

"I have never thought that of you," she said.

He nodded in a satisfied way.

"No," he admitted, "I don't think you have. Although once upon a time——"

"I should think more of you," she interrupted, "if you would forget that 'once upon a time.' The past is dead."

"No, it isn't," he said. "And since I have never had the chance of speaking to you about it until now, why should I deny myself the privilege of recalling all the past? You and I, Elma"—he waited a moment to mark the effect of the familiarity—"once upon a time were lovers. Say, let's talk it out here and now. Sit down on the pebbles there."

She sat down at his bidding, resting her chin on her hand, which was supported, in turn, by her knee.

"You know," he went on in a quiet, drawling tone, "I remember the night when I said to myself, 'God is not in His heaven. Only money counts.' My faith was broken. One disappointment had been followed by another until the weight became so great that I could scarcely rest my head. I am an Englishman, Elma, and although you and your people sometimes speak of Englishmen as if they were stolid as the oaks that they claim as the national symbol, you may take it from me now that we are a very sensitive race. And if there is one thing that breaks us up completely, one thing that makes us doubt the faith, it is the treachery of so-called friends. But to-day—— You are crying, Elma. I thought you were stronger than that."

She took her hands from her eyes at once.

"I am listening," she said sobbingly.

Again he nodded in that satisfied way. His face was very tense, and if the lines about his mouth were indicative of bitterness, they certainly helped to strengthen his face.

"To-day I feel that there is a wise Providence. It is as if I had been

made to suffer for years so that I might the more appreciate the joy of this hour." She made a gesture as if she would interrupt him again, but he waved a hand beseechingly. "I tell you, Elma, this is a moment when I ought to take advantage of the chance to recall the past. And I am going through 'with the story, whether you like it or not. You may get up from the beach there, and go away from me, but I shall tell it to the sea, to the air, to the gulls that are glancing round us now—if only to relieve my feelings. Nay, more than that, to relieve my conscience."

"I told you, though you knew already, that I am thirty years of age. In many respects I am an old man, for the last two or three years have taken much out of me. As a youngster of twenty, I left England possessed of a few thousand pounds left me by my father, and possibly more ambition than many of my years. I met your father soon after my arrival in Philadelphia. He was then a small man, unknown, and you—you were just a child, so I thought."

"My father before me had been an inventor; I had with me some of his incomplete plans, and I had been working on them for some time. When I had completed the first invention, I showed it to your father. He was clever, farseeing; we worked the invention together. He made fifty thousand dollars out of it. What did I get? Nothing, for he had been cunning enough to tie my hands behind my back with legal tape."

"His conscience pricked him, Elma—I will give him that much credit. I had got rid of my little fortune; he gave me a place in the works. I was still young, and you can't crush ambition out of a youth unless you crush the life out of him. I set to work on another invention. It was a lock nut, and, if you remember, I was staying in



your father's house at the time. I determined that he should not know anything about it until the whole of my experiment was completed.

"Elma, I wonder if you have any memory of the sympathy you used to give me in those days? We used to sit and talk together when I was tired of working; we used to speak—yes, of love. And if I was not an ideal lover, it was because my ambition was so great. I wanted to make good in the world before I turned to any woman and asked her to share my life.

"Well, the lock nut followed the other invention. It was stolen from me. I applied for a partnership in the works. If Ambrose Raybourne had been a little stronger than he thought—or shall we say a little more cruel?—if he had turned me out of his works and out of his life, I might have swallowed all these disappointments and made tracks for another sphere where a fresh start could have been made. But, by the same evil spirit that compels a murderer to revisit the scene of his crime, he kept me near him. By every means in his power he made it impossible for me to go elsewhere.

"The Welbrook Iron Works would have given me a managerial post if I had held up my little finger. But your father poisoned the minds of the Welbrook people against me. I applied to a dozen firms within a radius of three hundred miles. Always with the same result—the poison had got there first; until I was driven to plead with your father to give me a minor position in the works which my brains had been instrumental in making. My salary was reduced. God knows how he achieved his object, because my life had been as clean as any man's, but in those works the employees seemed to regard me as a shady character, as one dependent on the generosity of Mr. Ambrose Raybourne.

"Of course I lost you; but give me credit for this, Elma—I never attempted to force my humble self upon you. I passed you in the street as if you had been a stranger. I wonder what your thoughts were on those occasions. Did you think that I was so cheap, so humble, that I could forget those painted hours when you, a girl of sixteen or seventeen, used to sit with me and inspire me? Did you think that my heart was so impervious to pain that I could calmly see you stepping out of your car to pass into the theater with a laughing, merry party of men and women around you? Did you think when, sometimes, your eyes caught mine in the crowd as you came out of the theater, that it didn't matter to me that some man or other was handing you into the car and taking his seat opposite you?

"Then fate seemed to take pity on me. Your father, heaping contumely upon me at every turn, was led to fashion the first weapon with which I might attack him. He had fitted out the *Palma* for a cruise around the world. He wanted a chief engineer. He might have given me that post, and I confess to you that I was in such a position that the salary of the chief engineer would have made a strong appeal to me. Oh, no! I wasn't good enough for that. It wasn't in keeping with his idea of vindictiveness. He appointed as chief a man to whom I had taught the rudiments of engineering. He made me the 'second.'

"Now, try to remember all that happened on board the *Palma* before we struck the South Pacific. Try to visualize the gayly bedizened crowd with whom you dined and danced and sang. I used to watch you from the porthole of my cabin when it was my spell off. Sometimes you were no more than five or six yards from me. You used to sit with a man, Maberly Todd, at your side. Did you ever think of me, Elma,

or, like your father, did you feel that I was nothing to you?

"Do you remember that evening when the man Todd lurched against me as he came from the saloon—when his brain was sodden with wine and his legs were unsteady—do you remember that he accused me of bumping into him, and struck at me with his puny fists, and spat upon the deck as if I had been a foul beast that had strayed across his path? I showed no retaliatory spirit, although you and your father and some of your guests were standing near and looking at me with scorn. I accepted the vile vituperation of the man Todd without turning a hair; indeed, if you remember, I murmured an apology. Elma, if ever you meet that man again, tell him from me that he was never so near to death. For I could have taken him up in these hands and bent him as easily as I would a hairpin.

"Your father stayed at Honolulu. We came up on this last cruise. And now I will make a confession to you. As we backed away out of the harbor down yonder, I would have given this right hand if he had been on board, because something told me that the great chance for revenge had come. You are shrinking from me; I have terrified you with my words. But I wanted to tell you this story because, as I said, it will relieve—my conscience."

She had clasped her hands.

"Tell me," she said jerkingly, "what do you mean by that?"

"Wait," he said, "I am not through yet. We came up on that last cruise, the intention being to return to Honolulu at the end of a week. Don't attribute to me uncannily foresight, but I swear to you that as we came out of the harbor yonder, I *knew* that we should not return.

"There were more insults to bear from the Todd man, but I took them

philosophically, feeling that my turn would come before long. After all, who was the Todd man? In truth, he was nothing to me; he was too small a thing for me to worry about. Ambrose Raybourne filled my mind just then, as he fills it now." His voice had risen until it throbbed. "And now it comes to this: Ambrose Raybourne cheated me of my brains, cheated me of a fortune. But God is just, and now is my chance to cheat Ambrose Raybourne of a daughter."

"Stop!" she cried, as he took one step toward her, and her right hand was fumbling in her corsage.

He laughed with the hysteria that he had professed to despise in her.

"Yes," he cried, "I know you have got it—the revolver. All right; use it." And he raised his arms and bared his chest. "Shoot, if you like, and stay here alone. Go on—it's a challenge. Do the only thing that your father was afraid to do—kill me."

She took out the revolver from its hiding place. There was not the slightest fear in her eyes now, and maybe, if she had shown fear, if she had leveled the revolver, the embittered brute within him could not have been held in check:

"A challenge, is it?" she said quietly. With a swift movement, she hurled the revolver into the sea. "There!" she said, with her amazing calm. "That is to show you that I am not afraid of you. I have seen you kill a man—would you like to kill a woman?"

Slowly the raised hands dropped to his side; his head was lowered until she could no longer see his eyes. Then he turned on his heel and walked swiftly inland.

An hour later she found him sitting on the edge of the lagoon, some five hundred yards behind the caves. He was sitting with his hands covering his face, and his shoulders were shaking. He could not have heard her, for she

came lightly over the ground, and fully a minute passed after she had placed her hand on his shoulder before he looked up. She sat down opposite him and watched for a while. A soft wind came from the palms fringing the sapphire water of the lagoon and tossed a strand of her glorious bronze hair against his cheek. Then:

"That's why I wished to come to an understanding with you," she said softly. "I know the truth of a great deal of what you said, but I had hoped that the circumstances under which I find myself would have brought to the surface all the pity in your nature, all the chivalry of which you are capable."

"Don't!" he murmured.

"Yes, I must," she answered. "I listened with patience to your story, and if I did not show the sympathy that perhaps you expected, it was because—well, it was because of the circumstances again. Sympathy, Micah Steele, is a most dangerous emotion when one is lonely. And in your heart I don't think there is any desire to hurt me—even if you could. Those hours of which you speak when I was a girl were only hours of friendship, but I believe that your regard for me then was deep and sincere."

He turned and touched her hand.

"Smile, if you like," he said, "but I swear to you that amid all the joy that was mine during those hours—amid all the bitterness that came afterward—there was only one great desire in my heart so far as you were concerned. Then, as afterward, as now, I would have given my very life for the privilege of setting my lips on yours. Fancy"—and he smiled in spite of himself—"a man's life for a kiss!"

She drew back, as if fearing that if he went on talking in this strain, the situation might become unendurable.

"That arrangement," she reminded him.

"Ah, yes," he said, shaking himself as if he were flinging off all sentiment. "What about it?"

"I don't know how long we may have to stay on this island, but we are going to divide it into two parts. I can see from here that there are really two islands. Just beyond the lagoon, there is a narrow channel of water separating us from an island as large as this one."

"Well?" he said questioningly, and again the old light of revenge was in his eyes.

"Well," she echoed, "we are coming to the understanding. We can divide the food that is in the cache—"

"You mean," he said, "that we can divide the island between us?"

"Exactly."

"Why should I?" abruptly, defiantly.

"For no other reason," she told him, "than this: I am a woman dependent on the chivalry of a man." And, like him, she was summoning back the spirit of independence and resentment. "We will divide the island fairly. I want you to understand that I am not afraid of this loneliness. I am not, as you have been generous enough to admit, an ordinary woman. I am an American, and I say that as proudly as you have said that you are an Englishman. And an American woman is both sensitive and independent. You can take your choice which half of the island you will take."

"He cheated me of a fortune," Micah Steele said between his teeth.

"And let me tell you this, Micah Steele," and she laid her hand again on his shoulder. "An American woman is not afraid of death. I have made a fair proposition, and if you have any regard for the honor of a woman, if you will consider the position in which I find myself, you will not hesitate to agree to that proposition. Refuse to agree, and—"

"What will you do?"

She pointed to the sea.  
 "There is always sanctuary there—  
 from a coward," she said.

## CHAPTER V.

They divided the food found in the cache. He suggested the building of a hut for her, but she gave him to understand that she had staked her all on independence; the cache would do for her, she said. He listened in a pitying way, and when she said to him, "I'll get you to run up a flagstaff before you go," he placed his hands on his hips and eyed her steadily.

"You're still living on that hope, eh?"

"If you try to rob me of hope," she said a little chokingly, "you are mean, indeed."

"Say"—he looked away from her—"why can't you have a little confidence in me?"

"Confidence!" She shook her head. "I don't think I shall ever plumb the depths of your character, and——"

"That leaves you suspicious, eh? All right. Cling to your hopes."

She fancied that he sneered, and that fancy gained strength when he poohpoohed her suggestion that a flagstaff should be erected without delay.

"You don't think we shall be picked off? Is that it?"

"I don't know. It would be the luck of Ambrose Raybourne if you were."

"I'm thinking of the cache—that's what buoys me up. There must be a system of replenishing such places——"

"There's food for six months in that cache, and—six months is a long time."

"It's a lifetime," with a sob.

He looked toward the lagoon.

"From what I can see, there isn't a living creature on the strand save you and me."

"So there's nothing to fear? Thanks. I'm not afraid of—of animals."

"No—no," as if he hadn't quite caught her words. "Do you notice that

the other island stands higher than this one?"

"Well? What of that?"

"Nothing much. You're determined to make an enemy of me."

"An enemy! How ridiculous! I wish—I wish you would try to understand my attitude."

"You're not like the average woman," despairingly.

"I've always been taught to take care of myself." It was said proudly, defiantly.

"And you'll have your own way if you die for it, I'll be bound. How are you going to amuse yourself on this side?"

"I'll find a way."

He laughed rather coarsely.

"The independent woman has never quite convinced me," he told her.

"There generally comes a time——"

"Will you wait until I find it necessary to appeal to you?"

"Yes. But I'll keep an eye on you all the same. I'm going across to the other island." He shouldered his share of the food, and with a careless "Good day," strode inland.

She watched him till he was out of sight; then she crept into the cache, made up her bed from the sacks in the corner, and searched for and found candles and matches. In a corner of a seaman's chest she came upon the greatest treasure thus far—two old novels.

Micah Steele reached the chasm that separated the two reefs. There he looked back. There was a cleft in the coast line, and he could see her sitting on the beach, her knees drawn up, the sunlight playing mischievously on her white feet, and her nose buried in the pages of a book. He smiled as he said to himself:

"Unnatural! Absolutely unnatural, unless she saw the blessed thing before I did, and I don't see how she could

have done that, seeing that I discovered the cache."

He took from his belt pocket the all-important thing he had found in the cache and had purposely kept from her. He smiled again as he replaced it. Then he followed the chasm for a mile to find a narrowing that he might cross.

Elma read for an hour; then, tiring, she began to struggle with the problem of Micah Steele's character.

"Unnatural," she said to herself, even as he had done, "else he would not have gone with so little fuss. Or does he think"—she tightened her lips at the thought—"does he think that my independence of spirit is all a mask, and that I shall go to him, whining?"

Night came quickly, and with it a low and stronger murmuring of the sea. The breeze of early evening changed to fitful gusts. By midnight, the palms fringing the lagoon were wailing like lost children in a forest. And an hour later a typhoon hurled itself out of the black night and struck at the reef with demoniacal force. It came with a great whirl of water, circling and shrieking as it circled. It caught at the palms and tropical foliage and smashed them as if they had been straw. Then a deep, sonorous booming came from westward of the island, and Elma, terrified, fled toward the chasm.

A tidal wave was sweeping inward from the south. She knew that much, although it was impossible to see anything through the intense darkness. And now she had some inkling of what Micah *might have meant* when he had remarked upon the higher position of the second island. She shouted, "Coward!" "Coward!" And yet it was to him that she was fleeing.

Micah was down on the farther coast—urged there by what he believed to be the booming of a ship's gun—when the typhoon struck the island from the south. He raced back, his thoughts

being for Elma, and when he came to the edge of the chasm, he could hear her shouting: "Coward! Coward!" He could not see her, nor could she see him, and the howling wind carried her voice hither and thither. On the edge of the chasm, and at the point where he deemed it to be no more than six feet in width, he cupped his hands, and, using them as he would a megaphone, called her name again and again. A lull in the shrieking of the wind allowed them to hear one another. And he also heard, with fear in his heart—fear for her safety—the roaring and rushing as of angry waters as they swept over the lower island. He knew that terror had taken possession of her, for now she was shouting for her father, for Maberly Todd, for—yes, even for him, Micah Steele.

"Elma! Stay there! You are near the edge of the chasm."

And the drop to the sea that surged between the islands was a hundred feet or more.

"Stay there! I'm coming over."

But first he felt the edge of the bank until he found that which he had marked earlier in the day—a thick root that had grown out of the bank and in again, so that it resembled a handle jutting out. He walked ten paces from the spot, turned, came at a run, and leaped high and forward. A six-foot leap is nothing to an athlete, but in that tense darkness it required greater courage than one of twelve in the light of day. He came down on all fours, many feet beyond the farther edge. The wind had taken to shrieking again, and for a long while he could not hear Elma's voice. He dared not move from the spot on which he had alighted, for a means of escape from the rising waters on the south island had already occurred to him, and the success of it depended on the natural handle jutting out from the bank on the other side.



She stumbled through the darkness to where he was lying. He could not distinguish her face, but her quick and heavy breathing was eloquent testimony of her terror.

"Micah!"

"Coward!" he whispered beneath his breath, for he had heard the calumny and was stabbed to the heart.

"Micah! The sea! It has broken over the island!"

"There is safety on the higher ground."

"Safety——"

"We must get back."

"I dare not jump—in the dark."

"Six feet—no more."

"I dare not, in the dark." She was clinging desperately to his right arm; he could feel her hot breath on his face.

The noise of the swirling water was coming nearer.

"There is a narrowing of the chasm somewhere lower down, Elma."

"Listen!" She was looking over his shoulder, peering into the darkness. The waters were thundering toward them, and the crashing of the palm trees around the lagoon was terrifying even to him.

He felt his way to the edge of the chasm.

"One chance," he said in her ear.

"You dare not leap, so you must lie down here, facing the chasm. See! I shall set my feet—so!—then fall across, hoping to catch the root of the tree that should be straight in front of me—yonder. If I grip it, I shall make my body rigid; then you can crawl across——"

"Micah, I dare not!"

"It's the only chance, and it'll be gone if you hesitate. When I'm ready, I'll shout. Now!"

He fell forward flatly, and she grasped at his feet as if she would save him that way if he should miss his objective. She heard his loud,

jerky cry as apparently he missed with one hand; his body twisted sidewise. A long, throbbing minute passed, and then his voice rose above the wind:

"Ready!"

She crawled to safety, inch by inch. And when she had passed over his head, he dropped his feet, swung for a seemingly everlasting minute over the chasm, then drew himself up to the bank, she hauling at his shoulders.

He lay prostrate on the top, his breath gone, his senses swimming. She sat there in the dark, his head resting on her knee, her lips moving in prayer.

## CHAPTER VI.

That night Elma slept in the rude hut that Micah had fashioned for himself. There was no hesitancy in her acceptance of the shelter. He had led her to it without a word, stirred the moss and brushwood, made a pillow of a couple of sacks, and held out his hand in "good night." She said to him, as she stood on the threshold:

"I can't say all that is in my heart, but—but to-morrow——"

"Why say anything?" he answered almost roughly. "Besides, you are overwrought. To-morrow you may think differently. I shall sleep just outside the door. If you place this beam across the posts—so!—you will be secure."

He picked up the sapling inside the hut and showed her how it might be placed in position. Then he stepped outside and lay down on a pile of brushwood that he had placed there. In a minute she came to the doorway and dropped the sapling in the darkness. There was a fine ring in her voice as she said:

"Honor in a man—a white man—an Englishman, is not dependent on lack of opportunity." Then she went back to her rude couch, lay down, and slept with the confidence of a child.

Dawn came and found her still asleep. Micah roused himself and walked as far as the chasm to mark the ravages of the storm, which had passed as quickly as it had arisen. Then he returned to the hut and peeped nervously in. She was lying with one white, bare arm curled under her neck; the bronze hair lay like an aureole around her shapely head. The one cheek that he could see was flushed; and she smiled as she slept.

He set about the task of making a fire, and when, at last, she came from the hut, fish was sizzling in the pan.

"You'll like this," he said cheerily. "Flying fish. There were scores of them in the pools. We've got something to thank the storm for. Never tasted flying fish?"

"Never." She was eying him narrowly, as if she suspected him of playing a part.

"Sweet as a nut," he told her, adding confidently: "You'll like them."

"I'm sure of it," she said slowly.

He raised himself from the fire.

"There's fresh water just behind the hut. Maybe you'd like to rinse the sleep out of your eyes before you sit down to 'brekker'?"

She nodded her thanks, and went in the direction indicated. On her return she found that he had procured a large stone to serve as a table for her, and a smaller one that made a poor substitute for a chair. He served her with fish and biscuits, and intimated that there was an unlimited supply of fruit on the island.

"Have you breakfasted?" she asked in a subdued voice.

"Thank you," he said briskly, accepting the question as an invitation.

Her cheeks colored as he took his seat opposite her and began to chatter like a light-hearted schoolboy. The sun had not yet risen so high as to be oppressive, and an appetizing breeze came in from the sea. Her bronze

hair caught some of the shifting shades of light, and the sun flashed on the torn green dinner gown. Micah's eyes were dazzled when he looked across at her.

He did not remain long at breakfast, getting up with an apology and striding off in search of ripe persimmons. He placed the fruit before her, bending low to the action like one long accustomed to vassalage. Then he sat back and surveyed her thoughtfully.

"I reckon you're enjoying that," as she ate the fish.

"Yes. It's delicious."

"You couldn't get it in Philadelphia, no matter how much you might be worth."

"No?" doubtfully, as if she feared he was about to reopen the old wound.

"Say"—he was smiling across at her—"you can't imagine how pretty you look sitting there. It just tickles me to death to think that Ambrose—"

"I found something in the cache that you appeared to have missed."

"No?" He had forgotten Ambrose Raybourne already.

"Cigarettes." She brought them out of her corsage and handed them to him.

"You're some woman!" he said quietly. "Have you finished?"

"Breakfast? Yes."

"Then I'll clear away the things."

Her cheeks flushed.

"I'll do that," she said, but he wouldn't hear of it. He was determined to play the vassal to the end—the end of the meal, at all events.

The work done, they crossed to the other island to determine the damage done by the typhoon.

"We shall have to make another division of the food," he said, as, ruefully, they looked into the water-logged cache. "And as we're not sure how long we may have to stay here, it would be as well if we set a check on our appetites. I suppose you'll come



back to this island, now that the danger's past?"

She gave him a look that any other man would have interpreted rightly.

"Of course, if you're nervous, you may have the hut and I'll come here." He stopped. A laugh came to his lips. "Say," he drawled, "doesn't it get you—this situation? I wonder how—how Mabberly Todd or any of the crowd would have lived through it—how they would have treated it."

Her eyelids drooped. This mood in him, half cynical, half in earnest, was one that she had come to dread. She took a chance at that moment.

"Micah Steele," she said, going up to him and laying a hand on his arm, "I wish you would let me say this: You have behaved splendidly since we came here. No man could have given stronger proof of natural courage and chivalry."

"No man?"

"No man of my acquaintance."

He was silent for a moment. Then:

"A stronger proof of moral courage and chivalry will be Mabberly Todd's acceptance of your story if the Fates should decree that we are to be picked off."

She turned away, her cheeks crimson. He had expected the action, for, lowering his voice to a whisper that had in it a wonderfully tender thrill, he said:

"Still, Elma, you need not let that thought disturb you. If a boat should sight the island, it will be only you that it'll take off. I have an idea that this place will suit my health for a long while after you've gone. And nobody need know anything about my presence here."

She wheeled indignantly, the faint streak of masculinity that was in her resenting the innuendoes and covert suggestions. But he was ready for that attitude also. He unstrapped the flap of his belt pocket.

"I've got a present for you," he said, smiling foolishly, and, unfolding a lime leaf, he revealed to her big eyes half a dozen of the most beautiful pearls she had ever seen.

The woman in her betrayed all the weaknesses of the sex. She uttered a faint cry of delight, picked up two of the pearls from the leaf, and held them so that the sun might give them life and "movement."

"Oh, how wonderful! Where did you get them?" Then, before he could reply, the expression on her face changed. Hope surged into her heart. "There is a pearl fishery here? Tell me—quickly! Oh, don't keep me in suspense! There is a fishery, and soon they, the divers, the traders, will come, and——"

"Steady!" She was swaying slightly.

"But they will, won't they?" She caught at his arm; the working of her face was pitiable.

"You're right, and you're wrong," he said softly, and there was a gleam of pity in his eyes. "Traders may have been here, but there is no fishery. I found these pearls hidden away beneath a persimmon tree this side of the lagoon. I don't like the *smell* of them."

"Smell! What are you talking about?" In her emotion she shook him roughly by the shoulder.

"Why do men hide pearls?" he asked, and answered himself: "Because they don't want somebody else to find them—because they didn't come by them honestly."

"You're imagining all this."

"Maybe. Sometimes one has to rely solely on the imagination. I've shown you only a few of the pearls I came across; the others are in the hut. Down in these seas, life is held very cheaply. I've known a man to take half a dozen lives for three pearls that hadn't half the luster of those."

She wailed as she stepped back from him.

"I believe you have made up your mind to break my heart. You wouldn't care if we were never picked off this island."

He flinched before her tearful scrutiny.

"Say, you don't set much account by me, do you? It was the same with your father." And he walked away, leaving her crushed and sobbing.

He cleansed the cache of the seaweed and surf that had been swept into it by the typhoon, and, to use his favorite term, made it shipshape. She kept away from him while he worked, for the reason that she couldn't trust herself in his presence, so great was her bitterness against him. If he had held out the faintest glimmer of hope, she would have regarded him in the light of a superman; but at every turn he seemed anxious to convince her that they were marooned for the rest of their lives. As if to add to her misery, he sang snatches of old music-hall songs as he went about his work; he knew that she was within earshot. At intervals he came to the mouth of the cache and glanced about him, as if to satisfy himself that she hadn't wandered away.

At night he went back to his hut on the other reef, and he took with him some paper and a pencil that he had found in the seaman's chest.

He said: "I'll be down to breakfast"—said it in the casual tone of a city man talking to his devoted slave of a wife. "I'm going to do a bit of writing. Got an idea for a new propeller. Been thinking it over for three years, and this quiet should help more than anything. If—if I can suggest how you may amuse yourself—"

"Thanks," she said quickly. "I've got past wanting amusement."

He looked down at the torn dinner gown; there wasn't a great deal of it left, and she had looped it here and there with cactus thorns. Her bare

legs were scratched in a score of places, and there was a long scarlet scratch extending from the elbow of her right arm almost to the shoulder.

"Poor little woman!" he muttered, half beneath his breath. "It's pretty rough on you, but—"

"Stay a minute!" Her brows were rutted. "What do you mean when you say that you want to work on a new idea? Doesn't it suggest that you have some hope?"

"I never give up hope," he told her, fully understanding what was working in her mind. "I didn't give up hope when Ambrose—when a man I knew kicked me down in the gutter for the third time. Besides, if there wasn't an earthly chance of getting off this island, I should go on working—at something. Nothing like work for taking your mind from the petty things of life." He looked again at the torn gown and the bare legs. "I once knew a woman," he added slowly, "who was held up on a reef, same as you and me, and the things she used to make out of leaves and fishbones made me feel ashamed of my own helplessness."

An hour later, he saw her through a vista in the palms fringing the lagoon. She was bathing near the edge, stooping and swishing her lovely bronze hair in the sapphire water with all the joy of a naiad.

Next morning, she called him to breakfast. It was prepared near the lagoon, and she sat so near the edge that by leaning slightly she could see her reflection in the water. Vanity in her wasn't dead, and he was glad of it, for it showed that she had refused to allow hope to be entirely crushed, even if he didn't consider it right to buoy her up. Suddenly she said, in a cheerful tone of voice:

"Did you get on with your idea last night?"

He smiled in a grateful way. It was the first time for years that any

one had taken a sympathetic interest in his work.

"Better than I hoped," he said in reply. "I could make a fortune out of the thing if I could get hold of the right financier. I shall be more cautious the next time I go out to look for capital. Elma"—there was a thrill in his voice—"I would give something to know exactly what you thought of me that afternoon when the niggers went overboard."

She shivered a little.

"Never mind," he said resignedly. "When you come to reflect——"

"Please don't say any more about it," she said, and he nodded acquiescently.

At sunrise, the next day, Elma began collecting leaves with the idea of making a coverlet—it was his idea—and, tiring of the occupation, wandered to the cliff edge, near the chasm. A heavy haze lay on the sea, so that it was impossible to mark the horizon; but when she leaned over and looked down, a scream burst from her lips. The next minute, she was flying across the island to where she believed Micah to be.

"Micah! Micah Steele! A boat! Oh, God! A boat!"

It was only a catamaran that she had seen—a log hollowed, with a supporting log alongside, and a dun sail hanging limply from a primitive mast. But she knew that he hadn't made it; he had never been away from her more than five or six hours at a stretch, and had never mentioned the possibility of fitting out a craft.

Her voice echoed across the water of the lagoon. Where was he? Then she heard a voice—voices—that filled her with both joy and fear. She checked herself; then stole forward silently, stealthily. There was a screen of thick undergrowth between her and Micah and those who were with him. She hid herself by lying flat on the

ground when she heard a rough voice growl:

"You're a liar! You've got 'em!"

Then Micah's voice, half threatening, half sneering:

"The man who calls me a liar never gets away with it. But where have you sprung from?"

"What's that to do with you? Hand it to him, Bandy!"

There was a sound as of a man springing forward. Elma dared not look up. Her eyes were tightly shut, and she was seeing again a black form rise in the stern of a boat—seeing a heavy fist come round in a semicircle. She wailed as she heard again that strange sound of fist on jaw.

A minute of silence; then she summoned all the remaining courage within her, and, rising to her feet, peered through the bushes and tangle of weeds. The sight that awaited her frightened and fascinated her. Two men had come to the island in the gray of dawn; it was their catamaran that she had seen under the cliff. One man was lying on the ground, a limp, lifeless thing—or so it seemed. The other, coarse and brutal of expression—a shaft of sunlight broke on his face just as she drew the bushes aside—was at grips with Micah Steele. They were fighting—to the death. Instinct told her that. Besides, there was fiendishness in the set of Micah's body. She saw his face for a second as he swayed with his man; it was streaked with blood. The man on the ground never moved.

To and fro the fighters rocked, first one and then the other gaining a momentary advantage. The stranger was fighting for the throat; Micah was maneuvering for a grip around the waist. Ten yards beyond was a cleft that broke away from the main chasm. Once she saw Micah half turn to mark the distance to the edge; and, as he glanced, a fierce, exultant light flashed in his

eyes. The stranger was a heavily built, swart man with a great breadth of shoulder, and, as he fought, he poured out a vile torrent of invective.

Micah slipped. He was on his knees. The watching woman cried out pitifully, and the answer was a roar of triumph from the man still on his feet. He fell forward to grip at the throat of Micah; his hands were caught, turned aside, then two arms were wound around his body. They rolled, the pair of them, over and over to the very edge of the chasm. The swarthy man screamed as he realized his danger, freed a hand to strike at the head beneath him, and screamed in pain as his fist struck the ground, Micah having moved his head no more than a few inches at the second when the blow should have landed. The stranger half rose from the ground, the arms round him having relaxed; Micah lay still, inert. The stranger stooped to gather him up in his arms, or to roll him toward the edge. At the same time he shouted aloud his intention, cursing his man for a pearl-stealing swine.

Elma shut her eyes. She knew what was coming. She had seen the quick movement of Micah's knees as he brought them up to the stranger's middle; she heard the stranger howl with terror, and, although she didn't open her eyes, she knew that his huge body was balanced for a second on those knees, that Micah had made of the knees a lever, that— The scream rang through her brain.

When at last she opened her eyes, Micah was alone on the edge of the chasm. He was still prostrate with exhaustion. He turned over on his side, resting and hiding his face on his outstretched arm, as she crept slowly toward him. There was awful horror in her eyes.

"You've killed him? You—you sent him to his death? Speak!"

He rose to a sitting posture; the

blood on his cheeks gave him a terrifying appearance; he passed his hand wearily over his face, and, looking at the stained knuckles, smiled grimly. Without appearing to have heard her, he rolled again on his side and peered over the edge, peered down to the waters far beneath. She shrank back from him as she might have shrunk from a murderer.

"Killed him!" she whispered in awe.

Then she turned to look back at the second form—the form that hadn't stirred throughout the fight with the other man. She went near it. The life had passed, and on the ground near the head were three or four pearls!

She stole away, her face white—almost as white as that of the thing on the ground. She passed again into the undergrowth and sat down, watching through a vista the fascinating scene of tragedy.

Micah Steele rested a while, then regained his feet, walked up to the body, secured the pearls, and slipped them into his waistband, turned the man over, felt his heart, and, stooping, lifted the inert mass and carried it toward the lagoon. Elma watched as he gouged out a grave. When the task was finished, he came back to the little clearing. The light fell on his face. How old it had become! How tired and lifeless the eyes! How flaccid the limbs!

He had almost reached her; only a few yards separated them. She cried out, holding a hand before her eyes as she cried:

"Don't come nearer! Stop!" And a shudder passed through her. In her sight, he was a loathsome, repulsive thing.

It hurt him, that cry, for his lips dropped and quivered; and the pain in his eyes brought pain to hers.

"I didn't know that you had seen," he said, in a shamed voice.

"Those men—they might have saved us. You took their lives."

"They would have taken mine, Elma."

"They came for—for pearls; and you—you valued pearls more than human life. Don't touch me!" as he stretched out his hand appealingly. Then, with a faint whisper of hope in her voice: "We can't be so very far from the mainland." She was thinking of the frailty of the bark on which the two men had voyaged, and he read her thoughts as clearly as if she had given them verbal expression.

"Eighty miles to the next island," he said laconically. "I've done two hundred in a catamaran."

"You!" It was a sneer, and he flinched.

"You valued pearls more than human life," she said again, covering her eyes with her hands and moaning: "God have a little pity on me!"

"I valued *one* pearl more than the lives of those two men," he said slowly, and looked at her searchingly.

She dropped her hands and gave him look for look.

"*One* pearl," he repeated. "Those men came for the pearls that they had stolen and hidden from a trader. They valued life less than I did when they stole them. There is devilry in pearls."

"The next island——" Her mind was swinging about.

"They deserted from a schooner. They finished the captain and the mate before they left, and, with those pearls in their possession, God knows what might have happened. They could have bribed the crews of a dozen schooners."

"What did you mean by *one* pearl?" She was eying him curiously.

"I came upon them before they guessed there was a man on the reef. They were talking——"

"For God's sake be more explicit!"

"They had seen you—that's all."

She turned away with a little cry. Now she understood. She was the one pearl—the one pearl for whose honor he had fought. The sobs came rushing to her throat. She ran quickly in the direction of the cache.

For the remainder of the day he kept out of her sight. Night came, and in the darkness of the cache she reconstructed all that happened since the *Palma* went down. She analyzed her own emotions and his. And no matter how hard she tried to resist the idea, it was borne in upon her that between her temperament and his there was no great chasm. First, she set him in the mental dock as a culprit. There was the affair on the boat with the natives; then the heroism he had shown on the night of the typhoon; and lastly the defense of the *one* pearl.

Out of all this there came, too, the realization of the peculiar circumstances in which the two of them were placed. From the very first—and she was big enough to appreciate this at its right value—there had been a wonderful *moral* chasm between them. Might had not been right. A high sense of honor toward her had actuated him in everything that he had done, and this despite all that had happened in his life; despite the fact that her father, Ambrose Raybourne, had tried to crush his ambitions. She allowed her imagination to run. She began to wonder what Mabblerly Todd would have done had he been placed in the position of Micah, and——

She sobbed herself to sleep.

## CHAPTER VII.

Micah had been hurt in the affray with the pearlers. He kept to his hut during the whole of the next day, and toward evening she crossed the chasm and called to him. He crept out of the hut and sat down on a log. His cheeks were drawn, and, although he tried to



conceal it, there was a great feebleness in his limbs.

He looked up and smiled as she came near.

"Have you forgiven me?" he asked, in a boyish voice.

"Please don't!" She went past him and into the hut. There she found uncooked food, and, from the cold ashes of the camp fire, guessed that he hadn't eaten during the day. Without speaking to him, she went about the work of preparing a meal, and he showed his gratitude by eating hungrily.

"I didn't know that you had been hurt," she said softly, seeing him wince as he bent over to the platter.

"It was the first man that got it in," he said, not carelessly, but wearily.

She saw the stain on the torn shirt; the knife had been thrust at his ribs.

"No, leave it alone," as she moved toward him. "I've done all that's necessary, and I reckon I shall be all right after a day's rest. Say, do you think you could get down to the beach and make fast that catamaran—pull it up the beach and out of harm's way?"

She hesitated.

"I don't think—that—that I should care to trust myself to it. Not for eighty miles."

"I didn't ask you," he said curtly.

She shook her shoulders. This man was so difficult to understand.

"I'll see what I can do on my way back to the cache," she said, and he nodded his thanks.

She offered to assist him back to the hut, but he waved her aside. He stopped on the threshold to look at her.

"Good night—Elma," he said.

She was conscious of a great sickness coming over her. The reaction was just beginning to set in. Thus far, she had taken one disappointment after another with remarkable courage, had suffered him to throw down one hope after another with no more protest than a shrug of the shoulders or a bitter

word. Now, in this moment, when the light was going out of the sky, she felt lonely.

"That catamaran——" she murmured.

"Leave it to me—I'll make it secure first thing in the morning."

"You had something in your mind with regard to it."

"Naturally. I could do the eighty miles, given a fair wind."

"I told you that I didn't think I'd trust myself to the sea."

"Sit down, Elma!" commandingly. He himself remained standing, supporting himself against the side of the door.

"I want that catamaran. And I want you to steady your mind a little so that you'll be able to follow me clearly."

She had moved toward the log and seated herself on the end of it. Something in his eyes made her uneasy.

"We've had a great adventure on this reef, eh?"

She didn't reply. He went on:

"But you're pining to death for the old world. You would give some years of your life to be away from this place."

"How strangely you talk!"

"Sorry. You're pining to get away. Has it ever occurred to you to think of what the world will say when it hears that——"

"Stop! The world is not so cruel as that."

"It's crueler. It would listen to your story, but it would believe its own. It would shed a crocodile tear while you told of your hardships, and it would be tickled to death as soon as it got out of your sight."

"I shouldn't care what the world said or thought."

"I know you wouldn't. I've seen enough of you on this reef to know that you would tell the world to go hang itself, but all the same you'd break your heart. If—if a schooner should



happen along, there's just one thing to be done."

"Yes," with great eagerness, for it was the first time that he had held out even so faint a hope as that.

"You've got to go. The catamaran will do for me. Nobody need know that you and I have been alone on this reef. I'll take care the schooner doesn't get sight of me."

"Eighty miles," she murmured dreamily.

"Given a fair wind," he reminded her; then he smiled confidently.

"Thanks," she said, without knowing why she said it. She turned her head and looked out to sea. "You have been very kind to me."

"I was going to say something about that," bluntly. "I've tried to be kind, even if I haven't always succeeded. Now I'm going to be honest and frank. You've changed me wonderfully since we came ashore. There were wicked thoughts in my mind aboard the *Palma*."

"Don't let's go into that again."

"I'm not going to. But this is a moment when I think I'm justified in asking for a little return for that kindness you spoke of."

She started to her feet, but there was nothing in his face to cause alarm.

"What return—what kind of return?" she asked, with quivering lips.

"Just permission to speak my mind," he said, and he took the permission for granted. "Elma, I love you. I've loved you ever since I was a raw youngster seeking a way to make a fortune. I love you now that you're a woman." He faltered, and glanced nervously in her direction. As she made no sign of resentment, he went on, somewhat brokenly: "I used to say, Elma, that I would give my life for the privilege of being allowed to set my lips on yours. I say it again."

He waited expectantly. She touched him on the arm.

"Don't think that I haven't appreciated all you have done since we left the *Palma*. I have. Don't think me ungrateful if I make no direct reply to that last remark of yours, but—but doesn't it all seem mockery?" And, pointing to the lone, wide sea, she burst into a fit of weeping and ran from him.

He passed into the hut.

It was late afternoon of the next day. All the morning she had been in the cache; the midday meal had been shared with Micah at the door of his hut. The injuries he had received in his fight with the pearlers were more severe than he had thought, and it had become difficult for him to sit upright, so great was the pain in his ribs. He had allowed her to bathe the wound after their conversation of the previous evening, and the tears had rolled down her cheeks as she had gone about the task.

A new Micah Steele had arisen out of the Caliban she had known. She was beginning to appraise him at his true worth. What she believed to be her advanced ideas on the emancipation of women and women's ability to play a lone hand had undergone a radical change. She realized, not without a start, not without a little sigh, that all this while she had been dependent on the gallantry of Micah Steele. And no matter how hateful had been some of the incidents through which she had passed, no matter how brutal and primitive circumstances had compelled him to be, she fancied that behind it all she could see something that shone like the armor of a knight.

Although she had not said anything emotional in reply to his suggestion, or his expressed intention, of effacing himself in order that the world might not point the finger of scorn at her, she had been thrilled. He had done so much already, so much that she was now able to construe into nobleness,

that the idea of his hiding until some schooner should take her away and then trusting himself to the frail catamaran stirred her as she had never been stirred before.

Instead of bathing in the lagoon that afternoon, she ventured into the sea near the cache; and, while in the water, the long strands of bronze hair lying about her neck like seaweed, she saw, away on the horizon, the sails of a small coasting schooner. Even as she looked, she saw the lowering of a boat. With swift strokes she swam back to the beach. She was crying for very joy, and calling out: "Micah! Micah!" But, of course, he was in the hut, away on the other reef.

She snatched at the scanty garment that represented all, or nearly all, that was left of the green silk dinner gown, and ran inland. Her feet were bruised and torn by the undergrowth, but she did not heed that. The blood was racing through her veins. They were saved. The boat was coming toward the reef. Saved!

And then, like a shadow falling over the surface of a placid, sun-kissed lake, came the recollection of all that he had said the night before. They would be taken off the island, he and she, and the world would listen and shed crocodile tears as she told her story, even as he had said, and the world would be tickled to death by its own story when she had turned her back.

But that wasn't all. Micah Steele was not the man to go back either on his word or his intentions. He had said that the catamaran was for him, and he had said it in such a way that she knew nothing she might say would sway him from his purpose, no, not even if it meant his making the last great sacrifice of all before the boat should reach the beach. Could she leave him? Not until that moment had she seriously considered the contingency. The moment she asked herself the ques-

tion, the answer came rushing from her heart. She could not leave him. She didn't want to leave him, not even if it meant the end of everything for both of them. She knew that she would be asleep in the hut, dreaming of her; the woman in her whispered, "He has always been dreaming of me." And subconsciously she knew that she had always been dreaming of him. The Mabblerly Todds of life faded away. Here was a man who had never allowed himself undue sentimentality, a man in whose heart honor held so strong a place that circumstances mattered nothing.

She found her way back, not to the beach, but to the cliffs, and, peering round a jutting ledge, looked for the boat. There were three men in it. They were coming to save her from exile, and she knew in her heart that she didn't want to be saved.

Crouching in the shadow cast by the ledge, she strained her ears to listen. The voices of the men floated up the side of the cliff. They had come ashore for fresh water. Two of them got out and carried a cask between them; the third lay back in the boat and lit his pipe.

Elma crept from the cliff and made her way swiftly to the north reef. Micah was sitting outside the hut and staring at the white ashes of the camp fire. He did not look up as she ran toward him, and even when she came to a halt immediately behind him, and when he must have known that she was there, he remained with his hands supporting his chin. There came over her a wave of pity, and something that was greater and deeper and more abiding. With the impulsiveness of a child, she stooped and wrapped her arms around his neck; with the joy and ecstasy of a woman who has felt love for the first time, she kissed him.

"Micah!"

"Elma!"

"Keep quiet." She pressed her cheek against his, like a mother hushing her child lest its cry should be overheard by those who would injure it. "Keep quiet a long while."

"Elma, what has come over you?"

"Hush, Micah! Don't ask me—now."

A man's voice came from a distance—a man calling to his mates.

"What's that?" Micah cried, and would have struggled to his feet had she not forcibly held him down.

"Micah, it's a boat. I saw it some time ago. Three men have come for fresh water."

"They saw you?"

"No."

"You signaled?"

"No."

"Why not? There must be a ship outside the reef."

"There is—a schooner."

"Then why didn't you signal? Let me go down to see."

"No, don't!" Then wailingly: "Eighty miles in a catamaran. I—I daren't let you go, Micah."

"Elma!"

"I don't care what the world says!"

"But if you let this schooner go, it may be months——"

"I've thought of that. Don't talk. Don't remind me——"

"You're weak and hysterical, Elma. You've got to go."

"Alone?"

He closed his eyes as he said:

"If I went, Ambrose Raybourne would call it revenge."

She shook her head vigorously.

"Ambrose Raybourne will believe his daughter."

Suddenly he opened the pocket of his belt and took from it that which he had found in the cache on the first day—a notice of the date on which the schooner, with provisions, would call again. He showed it to her.

"Can you still care for me?" he asked. "I've kept that from you all this time. You—you were pining for the ship of deliverance; I was hoping that it might never come."

She went near him and placed her hand on his arm. "Listen!" she whispered.

They could hear the boatmen shouting to each other.

Micah, holding her hand, ran toward the chasm and looked downward and toward the junction with the sea. The men were running the boat into the water. Micah placed his hands to his mouth.

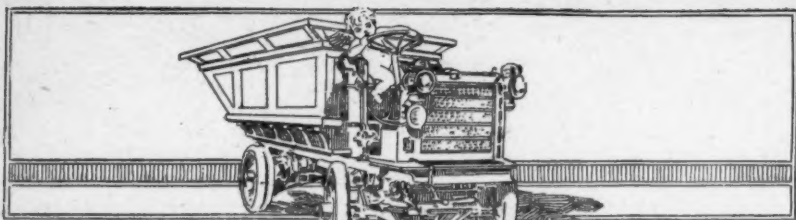
"Ahoy!"

They looked up, waved, and began to climb the cliffs.

Micah wrapped his arms about the woman.

"We'll face the world and its story just—just like this," he said.





## EBENEZER TIMPSON'S SON BY WILLIAM ALMON WOLFF JR

**T**HERE is no use in pretending that this business of Ebenezer Timpson's son was simple. It was about as complicated as anything could be.

But an effort is going to be made to unravel it so that it won't be too hard for you to understand it. And the late Charles Dickens can't escape his fair share of responsibility, either. Loyalty to one's craft is all very well, but there is a limit. This author is not going to cover up the part that Dickens played. Some authors would hem and haw, and then proceed to gloss over that part of the business. But this one has a conscience.

The title of this story refers to a particular son, of course. And to the particular son of a particular Ebenezer, too. But the idea was to have a sort of unending series of sons. Even if there were half a dozen of them, sons, in a generation, every one of the poor fellows was tagged with an Ebenezer when he was baptized. He might have a lot of other and perfectly respectable, nice names, but the Ebenezer was sure to be hanging around somewhere. There were twins once, and they went to college, in the same class. And on a night of their freshman year they were routed out, with the rest of the class, by sophomores of an inquiring turn of mind. There was a sort of roll call. The first twin said his name

was Albert Henry Ebenezer Timpson, and the second said *his* name was Joseph Ebenezer Michael Timpson. The sophomores thought the twins were trying to be funny, and it took them a long time to live the thing down. But parents don't think of such things when they are selecting names for their offspring. And there was a special reason for this Ebenezer thing.

Perhaps it isn't fair to lay all the blame on Dickens. You shall have opportunity to judge. A long time ago, you see, when Dickens was very much the thing, an Ebenezer Timpson sold coal. His father had done that before him, and had done pretty well at it. And his son and successor, urged on by a desire for the expression of his own individuality, bought a new sign when he got the business. Just to repeat "Ebenezer Timpson, Coal," wasn't satisfactory. So he announced himself as "Ebenezer Timpson's Son." And then he moved into a new building—a fine, modern affair of two stories, in red brick with white trimmings, 'way uptown; it was somewhere near Fourteenth Street, and really out of town in those days.

It must have been about that time that he read about the Cheeryble Brothers or the bank in "A Tale of Two Cities" or "Dombey and Son," or something like that.

"Go to!" he said. "What's the mat-

ter with that sort of tradition for the business?" Or words to that effect. He commercialized the musty atmosphere that had represented color and old-world charm to Dickens. And the more he thought about it, the more he liked the notion. He had some imagination, and he peeped into the future and saw unborn generations of New Yorkers buying their coal from a succession of Ebenezer Timpsons' sons. Great stuff! You see how the strain of Yankee shrewdness got the advertising value out of the Dickens idea?

And it worked out well, too. Thanks to the practice of tacking an Ebenezer on to the name of every male Timpson and bringing the said male Timpsons up on the family tradition, an endless supply of Ebenezers and sons was assured—so far as anything could be assured. The whole thing, if you stop to think and philosophize about it a little, was very American. In the effete monarchies of Europe it takes centuries to establish a tradition. Here we do it while you wait. Consider the correspondence schools. Without pretending to have any really deep knowledge about them, the author ventures to assert, without fear of successful contradiction, that all the really good ones can give Harvard and Yale and Oxford and the University of Cracow cards and spades when it comes to traditions.

New York fell hard for the Timpson tradition. All the best people got their coal from Ebenezer Timpson's Son. And they kept right on doing it, after the town had swarmed all over and beyond the little building. It wasn't, of course, in an obscure court. New York doesn't have such things, and the Timpsons weren't taking unnecessary chances, anyhow. They wanted their quaint old building to be where it could be seen. And they weren't fanatical about conservatism, either. They adopted all the best weighing methods

and the latest practice in the interpretation of what a ton really is. They went in for motor trucks and telephones. But the old building and the old sign and the old brass plate remained; and they went to a good deal of trouble to find old, white-haired clerks, with bent backs, who sat on high stools in the dingy old office and took your order. Of course, you didn't see the modern office in the rear, where the real work was done by bright and efficient young clerks, with the aid of typewriters and adding machines.

Every family has its black sheep. Perhaps it was the subtle, pervasive influence of the coal dust, but, anyhow, a lot of Timpson wool was dark in hue. There never was such a family for quarrels. Young Timpsons were always being disinherited and kicked out—and most of them proceeded to become malefactors of great wealth. This was disconcerting to the stern parents. There isn't any satisfaction to be found in disinheriting a boy and then having him come to your deathbed for the final reconciliation carrying orchids and telling James, the chauffeur, to return with the limousine in half an hour. In fact, it makes you so mad that you postpone dying, and try to make a few more millions to catch up with him.

That was how our particular son, the one in whom we are most interested, got caught in the toils of that wretched tradition. He was christened William Ebenezer Timpson, but he was so remote from the succession that he got to be generally known as Billy Timpson. Under that *nom de plume*, he helped to win one or two football games, became the temporary holder of the low-hurdles record, and finally reached Paris and the *Ecole des Beaux Arts*. He wasn't notably interested in architecture, but it was that or coal, and he didn't hesitate a minute. He hated coal. That was his real mission in life—hating coal.



He had two brothers older than himself, and it seemed probable that they would stand effectually between him and the throne of Ebenezer Timpson's Sons, so to speak. But, unlike Bill, they had inherited the family temper. One of them gave up coal at an early age, and when Bill went to Paris, was already beginning to make Wall Street sit up and take notice. The other one lasted longer; until just before his father's death, in fact. Then there was a grand row, and he accepted a job, at an enormous salary, with a railroad. But there was time for Bill's father to make a new will, and that will made Bill his heir—with conditions. He had to be Ebenezer Timpson's Son. He had to learn that coal business and administer it until he was thirty. Bill's father felt that that provided a fair margin. It was inconceivable to him that any Timpson could really get into touch with coal without loving it.

He didn't make due allowance for Bill's artistic temperament. It wasn't a very husky temperament. Bill wasn't much of an artist, when you come down to it. It seems probable that one of his ancestors had made a *mésalliance* some time and married a lady who painted china, and that that artistic strain, diluted by the years, had come out in him. But this isn't a treatise on heredity. These remarks are intended simply to show people how careful they ought to be about marriage. You never can tell.

Bill Timpson was dutiful enough as a son—not as a Son, mind you. He was as fond of his father as he could very well be of a man he really hadn't known very well. It seems probable that his father had wanted to retain Bill's esteem and liking, after his early experiences with his elder sons, and had consequently kept Bill in a sort of perpetual exile. If they didn't see one another, they couldn't very well quarrel, of course. So Bill had known his

father by sight, and that was about all.

He came home for the funeral, and then, with the consent of the executors, hurried back to Paris to take some examination or another. He explained that, even if he was to sell coal, it wouldn't do any harm to finish up his education as an architect. People might stop using coal, or a substitute might be discovered, or the supply might give out suddenly. It was as well to be prepared. Anyhow, he got away with it, whatever the reasons he gave. He didn't mention the real reason, which was—or who was—Sybil.

Sybil Deane. He had fallen pretty hard for Sybil. Lots of men did that. She was the sort of girl who fills men with a sense of their own unworthiness, makes them feel like crawling, abject things that don't belong on the same planet with such a girl. The real appeal, in such cases, is to man's eternal vanity. Men aren't really abject, you know. They feel so for a little while at first. Then they rouse themselves and pull themselves up. The girl notices them, smiles at them. And they decide that, by gad, any fellow who can win even so much from such a girl must be pretty close to the Real Thing. They get chesty. And if her mother approves of them, after referring to her pocket Bradstreet, there is a boom in white satin and orange blossoms and that sort of thing.

The Deanes were Americans. But they weren't the vulgar, tourist sort. Not by a good many broad a's and dropped g's. They were of the rarified, highly superior sort of Americans abroad whose American origin is sometimes forgotten by their European friends. They had lived there for years. America, you know, is so crude, so new. And it's so infernally expensive, too. American dollars go very much farther in Paris, for example, than in New York.

It's very easy to blame people like the Deanes for the life they lead. It's easy to sneer at them like this, and poke a rather cheap sort of fun at them. Probably they deserve it, too, to a certain extent, at least. But there's another side to the medal, as there usually is. It's hard for folk like the Deanes to economize and play second fiddle. Deane, you see, had worked himself out. He had had a big income. But it stopped when he did, and the insurance money, invested as the money of widows and orphans ought to be invested, provided an income that was all right for expatriates in Paris or Dresden or Munich, but that would have meant Flatbush or an apartment in Harlem without an elevator had the Deanes stayed in New York.

Sybil, you see, became her mother's big asset automatically. Perhaps Mrs. Deane wasn't so very much to blame for running down America and keeping her Bradstreet handy—running down America, you understand, the while there were days when she dared not go near the embassy for fear of the gulp that came into her throat when she saw the flag, and when the thought of soft-shell crabs and succotash and indigestible hot rolls, all soft and fluffy as they came from the oven—

Home, you know, has its meaning. Kipling wrote of the broken men who "sail o' nights to England." But there are broken men, and women, too, as surely exiled as his, but not for such cause as lay behind the men who "do not lunch on steamers, for they are English ground."

But now Mrs. Deane saw Sandy Hook in the offing, so to speak, and we really needn't feel sorry for her any more. All that melancholy digression because of a little sneer!

"Of course, dear Sybil is her own mistress," Mrs. Deane confided to her friends—feminine friends. "Her heart

must speak for her. But Billy Timpson is a dear boy. It would make me very happy——"

Certainly it looked as if "it" would make Bill happy. He was fluttering around Sybil in moth-and-candle style, and she was a stunning candle. She had that sort of ash-colored blond hair that makes the simile singularly apt, and gray eyes, and she was tall. If she hadn't been so awfully well brought up, so efficiently mothered, she would have been altogether charming, too. When she was alone in her room, she used to get out American papers and read about Harvard-Yale football games and vulgar, crude, new things like that. And deep within her was the terrible nostalgia of the American child abroad who cannot remember America, beside which all other sorts of homesickness are as nothing. Accept this on the word of one who has suffered it.

Probably Sybil and her mother had never actually talked about her marriage and the money it had to bring back to the family. But the thing had seeped right through Sybil's skin and impregnated her. It was one of those things that are so well understood that they need not be put into words. Sybil would no more have thought of marrying a man who didn't have money than you would of reading another person's letters. But, though the necessity for such a marriage was so well understood—though she had been brought up in an atmosphere that not only sanctions, but almost enforces, such ideas of marriage—the thought of it crushed her, deadened her. She was the loveliest thing when she talked to older people, to married men, to hopeless ineligible. But when a Billy Timpson, with his white teeth and his honest grin and his cheerful blue eyes and his Bradstreet rating, came along, Sybil's eyes became closed windows that shut all sight of her away. But,

even so, she was so very lovely that Bill Timpson wanted her, as many men before him had wanted her.

As for Sybil, she didn't know what she wanted. Certainly she felt differently about Bill than about any of the others. She liked him; in a queer, embarrassed, tongue-tied sort of way. And she was perfectly willing to marry him, because, of course, what she wanted didn't make any difference. Europe and Mrs. Deane had brought her to that point. If that imperative summons hadn't taken Bill back to New York just when it did, the engagement would probably have been announced. But that journey left things in the air.

Bill, as you know, came back to Paris thinking about Sybil, wanting her rather more fiercely than before. But he came without warning, too, and the Deanes were at Etretat, where one can be decidedly in the swim without having to spend so very much. He attended to his business, and a sort of conscience kept him from going to look for Sybil. He hadn't said anything to the executer about a girl, of course. And so the first thing that made Mrs. Deane apprehend a crisis was her return to Paris, where she made the double discovery that Bill had come back and that he was sailing for New York again at the end of the week—in three days, to be precise.

Mrs. Deane adopted heroic methods. With many a sigh, she took passage for Sybil and herself. She could just manage it. But it wasn't the home-going of which she had dreamed. She couldn't raid the shops, and step off the liner a dazzling vision. It had to be, though, and she didn't really hesitate a minute. Even as she bought her tickets, she was preparing her explanations. She was making a hurried business trip on the shortest sort of notice. And so forth, ad lib.

And then even the sea voyage went wrong. There should have been roman-

tic passages at night, under a silver moon in a cloudless sky, far up in the bow. And there weren't. Because Sybil, to be frank, was awfully—seasick. She couldn't lift her head from her pillow, and if she had been able to do that, and had seen herself in a mirror, she wouldn't have shown herself on deck, anyhow.

Bill couldn't get flowers for her at sea, but he sent her great quantities of champagne, which is a specific for some people when they are sick at sea, and he walked Mrs. Deane along the wind-blown decks for miles. Sybil turned up the night before they got to Quarantine. But it was too late. She looked like a ghost—a beautiful, bewildering ghost. She was pretty well used up, and Bill told her how sorry he was, and held her hand for a little while, and loved her. But that was all. You simply can't make love to a lady who has been seasick for six days. Humanity forbids it.

"Hope you're going to stay a while, now that you're here," said Bill, after he had helped them through the customs. "I'll be busy as the deuce for a week or so. But then I'd like to look you up, of course, and show you how New York's changed. Think you'll like New York, Sybil?"

She wanted to be enthusiastic, to gush. But she didn't know how. All she could manage was a remote, rather chilling: "I hope I shall."

All the heroes don't wear Carnegie medals. This was pretty serious business for Mrs. Deane. But you would never have guessed it had you looked at her. She was a little baffled. Something had gone wrong. The chances were, she knew, that nothing serious was amiss, that the affair would resume its normal course if it had time. Time! That, owing to its proverbially close connection with money, was just what she didn't have. A few weeks she could manage. But she shuddered

at the thought of the grinding economy that would have to atone for this adventure if they had to go back to Paris with Sybil still unmarried.

"We'll make our headquarters at the Tarleton," she said. "Way down on the avenue, you know, near Washington Square. So quiet! Old-fashioned, of course—but I dread the thought of one of the great new hotels! We shall have to make some visits, of course. My old friends won't take no, I'm sure."

Bill took them to the Tarleton in a taxi, and vanished. He hated coal as much as ever, but if the thing had to be, it was as well to make a start. He was like a man who has finally decided to have a tooth of long standing extracted. He—the man with the tooth—has fussed around for months, maybe, and lied, and attributed his toothache to neuralgia and the Democratic party and the spots on the sun. But when he finally decides to have it out, woe to his dentist if he has to wait thirty seconds in the reception room. Bill didn't even go home from the Tarleton. He drove, instead, to the office of Ebenezer Timpson's Son.

He had made an appointment by wireless with the executor of his father's will. This executor was just the sort of man an Ebenezer Timpson would esteem and trust. A primrose by the river's brim was just a yellow primrose to him all right. His name was John Curtis, and when Bill finally turned up, he looked at his watch and cleared his throat portentously.

"You said twelve o'clock, young man," he stated. "It is now thirteen minutes after the hour."

"Well—I—er— A liner that's come three thousand miles isn't particular about minutes in docking, you know," said Bill feebly.

He was forgiven. He had to be respectful, because his fate was up to this—personage. Curtis didn't have to turn

over the business and Ebenezer's money to Bill—not unless Bill lived up to the provisions of the will. And Curtis was the sole judge of whether or not Bill did so. There was only one gleam of hope. Ebenezer, it seemed, had made a not unnatural mistake about Bill's age, knowing him as slightly as he had, and the period of probation was only about six months. But for those six months, Bill guessed, after one look at Curtis, he would have to walk a chalk line. He didn't begin to guess the truth.

"You're to learn the business," said Curtis. "I know what were your father's views in such matters. They coincide with my own. You will start at the bottom. I am disposed to construe this, however, with a certain degree of liberality. Strictly speaking, you should work in the coal pockets that will belong to you if you prove worthy. But I shall allow you to start on a somewhat higher rung of the ladder. You will report to the yard foreman to-morrow for instruction in driving a delivery truck."

Bill didn't say anything. What he thought shall not sully this page. He didn't think it all at once, anyhow. The thing grew on him. At the moment of full realization, when, had Curtis been present, he would have attempted to murder that worthy man, he was having lunch at a club. He looked out of the window and saw a large truck, emblazoned with the device of Ebenezer Timpson's Son, backed up to a house opposite. A grimy man was manipulating a dingus that raised the bottom of the truck and slid the coal down a chute and through a hole in the sidewalk into a cellar.

"Good God!" said Bill, deeply moved. He pushed his omelet away with a sudden loathing.

Later a well-meaning friend told him gently that one bottle of mineral water should not serve for more than two

drinks of whisky at the outside. And the next morning he reported to the foreman, and began to learn how to drive a coal truck.

That was how Bill began to lead his double life. He shouldn't have been ashamed of honest toil. He ought to have had sense enough to tell the thing as a joke. But he didn't. The only moderately intelligent thing he did do was to get old Curtis to agree to a sort of incognito. The men didn't know who he was. The foreman would have fired him for incompetence in a week if he hadn't had orders to keep him. But he improved. After a while he was allowed to take charge of a truck, and he and a husky helper delivered coal all over town. Bill had a trick, in those days, of wetting his hands, rubbing them in the contents of the truck, and then giving himself a facial massage. It seemed odd to the helper, but Bill was generous in the matter of buying beer.

The Deanes had fleeting glimpses of him. They saw a Bill with hunted eyes and a furtive manner. This was really due to a perpetual backache, acquired professionally, but Mrs. Deane couldn't be expected to know that. She had had distressing experiences in the past.

"There is something on his mind," she said to herself. "I wonder if he has lost his money."

She tried to find out. But it proved difficult to get the exact sort of information she wanted. Such questions as were in her mind are not to be put crudely, and she was out of touch with New York and its environs.

Bill was just as unhappy as Mrs. Deane. He wasn't very observing. Had he been a woman, of course, he would have seen through a good many of Mrs. Deane's subterfuges. He would have recognized remade dresses. Mrs. Deane managed wonderfully, but there were things for the practiced eye to see. But Bill had always taken the

Deanes at Mrs. Deane's own valuation. He had heard some of her opinions, and judged that Sybil shared them. He didn't have nerve enough to tell the truth and settle matters with Sybil. It is betraying no secret to say that his truck driving, properly explained, would have appeared to Mrs. Deane as a quaint conceit—delightfully American, you know.

Bill heaved a sigh of relief when the Deanes began a round of visits in Long Island and Westchester. This truck-driving period couldn't last indefinitely. He kept hinting to Curtis that his ignorance of office work was appalling. When he began to learn that side of the business, he would try his luck with Sybil. This was all very well planned. But he didn't reckon with the infatuation of Sowerby.

Mrs. Deane had no need to worry about Sowerby's money. His fortune was huge, and it wasn't subject to fluctuations of any sort. He was about forty-five years old, and he had chuckled for years at the maneuvers of ladies with daughters. He was supposed to be immune. But he wasn't. A week of Sybil at a house party silenced his chuckles. Mrs. Deane didn't have a thing to do with it, either. The idea of hooking Sowerby simply didn't enter her head. And she wasn't the sort of woman to waste her time on the unattainable. He actually spoke to her first, and she almost fainted. Then she laid down the law to Sybil.

"No," said Sybil very quietly.

America, you see, had got in its deadly work. Sybil in Paris was one girl; Sybil, reveling in things she had dreamed of all her life, was another. Her interesting pallor had almost completely succumbed to the vigor of the American sun.

"I'd have married Billy Timpson—if he'd asked me," said Sybil. "He's rather a dear, and I do like him. But now I wouldn't marry even him. I'm



sorry, mother. I know just how awful it is. But I can't help it. I think I'll learn shorthand."

Would she have held out? Who knows? The pressure began at once. It was pretty severe. Consider the way she had been brought up. She needed help certainly, and there was none in sight. She was determined enough, obstinate enough. But mighty forces were arrayed against her. They really were mighty. One may sneer at such things, despise them, abhor them, but one does well to recognize that they are very real, very powerful things. A good many imposing, huge edifices in this world are built on lies, on false conceptions. But it takes a strong blast to overthrow them for all that.

Mrs. Deane was frightened. And that made her fight all the harder, all the better. She played her cards very well. She didn't bluster, of course. And she handled Sowerby beautifully. He was furious, and astonished as well, when Sybil refused him. But he wanted her pretty badly; so badly that he was willing to lay siege to her, when he found she was not to be taken by assault. And he used his heaviest artillery—his money and the things it gave him. He had none of Bill's innocent illusions about the Deanes and their manner of life. He saw through Mrs. Deane's poor pretensions as easily as any woman would have done. And he knew that in her lay his best, indeed his only, chance with Sybil. He put himself in her hands.

Sybil got daily demonstrations of what it meant to be as rich as Sowerby. He had automobiles enough to set a man up nicely in the livery business. His yacht was pictured in the Sunday supplements. She saw a couple of his houses. And she began to understand that if she didn't marry him, she would have to go back to a *pension* in Paris and leave behind the glory that America was to her. There was her threat

of becoming a stenographer. But she had never been able to learn to spell.

She wasn't happy. She knew that she was the object of a siege, and she distrusted her defenses, for all her brave words of defiance. And then, one day, at the Lurton house party, she escaped for a walk. She was about at the crisis of the siege, she knew. After all—what could she do?

She walked dismally along a country road. The sweet, heavy smell of hay was in the air. The hum of insects innumerable was in her ears. On each side the goldenrod flamed in yellow glory. She had never seen goldenrod before. At a turn in the road she came upon a vivid, blazing patch of red—sumach. Goldenrod and sumach do not confront one in the streets of Paris. But Sowerby—

Behind her sounded a vast noise that broke in upon the hum of the insects. She turned and saw a huge truck lumbering along toward her. Then it stopped, and she saw two men get down. They had run the truck to the side of the road, and they sat down under a tree and began to eat. Aimlessly, she turned and began to retrace her steps. She had to go back, of course. As well now as later.

Bill tried to get away, but he was taken by surprise, and he was fairly caught.

"Billy Timpson!" said Sybil. "What on earth!"

He had a huge, coarse sandwich in one hand and a bottle of beer in the other. He dropped them both, and stared at her.

"I gotta fix that hind wheel, Bill," said his helper, with a fine tact. He left them alone, staring at each other.

"We—we just stopped to eat our lunch," said Bill.

"Yes—of course!" said Sybil. "But Billy—what are you doing—in those awful clothes—with coal dust all over you—and that truck—"

"We delivered some coal at the Lurons'," said Bill.

"I'm staying there!"

They looked at each other.

"Oh—damn!" said Bill suddenly and fervently. "Sybil—look here! I've been dodging you—waiting for this to be over—but I can't wait, now that I've seen you. Sybil—do you care? I've been in love with you for ages and ages, and every time I've meant to ask you, something's happened—"

"I know," said Sybil strangely. "Wasn't it absurd for me to be seasick? Billy—"

Heaven knows what she meant to say. She was desperate enough to blurt out everything. But her mother got there in time. She and Sowerby weren't leaving Sybil alone very much, you see—and some one had seen Sybil start for her walk. Sowerby, in his runabout, was hidden by the great truck, but he was right there.

"Sybil!" said Mrs. Deane.

She advanced majestically. She took in Bill and his clothes, the truck, the helper, the grime that pervaded Bill, in one sweeping glance.

"I do not wish to seem unsympathetic, Mr. Timpson," she said. "Doubtless you lost your money through no fault of your own. I respect your courage in undertaking such—ah—humble work. It is in line with our best American traditions. But you must see surely that an acquaintance with my daughter that I was glad to permit in other days is now out of the question. Sybil!"

Bill just gaped. His illusions were falling all about him. And he saw Sybil wilt. She did just that. Her mother took her arm and drew her away. He stood for a moment, staring. And then he leaped for the truck.

"Come on, Hank!" he cried.

Hank came, but not swiftly. There were delays, inevitable delays, it

seemed, that chafed Bill. He wanted to pretend that the truck was a racing runabout. He wanted to burn up the road, to be arrested for speeding. And finally he did get the ponderous thing started, and they came to a little down grade, and it attained quite a respectable speed, so that they rolled and swayed from one side of the road to the other, and Hank found it very hard to manage his sandwich and his beer. Also, Bill sang. He was one of the very worst singers in the whole world, and when he sang, his emotions were very much engaged.

All his illusions had gone, you see. You must have guessed that Bill wasn't one of these brilliant chaps, always doing the right thing by a sort of fine intuition. He could make just as glorious a mess of things as any one you know. But he wasn't quite a fool, either. He had seen the panic in Mrs. Deane's eye. He had heard her words, which had been, as they were intended to be, very much to the point. And he had seen Sybil, on the very point of revealing an eager, passionate side of herself that he had never seen before, yield meekly and allow herself to be taken away. And these things explained so much that had gone before. He had heard things in Paris, of course. There had been cynics there who had not shared his illusions about the Deanes. Things had been said. He had refused to listen, or had silenced those who said them. But—the memory of such things rushed over him now.

Ebenezer Timpson's Son's trucks were not built for speed. Something happened to one of the wheels of this one. That was at the foot of the hill. The damage wasn't serious, but bits of the truck that it seemed desirable to retrieve were scattered back along the road for a hundred yards. Hank dropped off meekly, and went to look for them. Bill stood up morosely, and

watched him, knowing that he ought to help and perversely determined not to do it. And in the vast body of the truck, trying to hide behind a pile of coal sacks, was something in what had been a white dress. Bill's heart turned upside down, and he vaulted quickly down into the three-inch layer of coal dust.

"Sybill!" he said.

She turned around and looked at him. Her face was streaked with coal dust. Her dress was grimy with it. Her hands were as black as his own.

"I—I—ran away again!" she said. "I climbed up over the back of the truck, because you'd started, and your old engine made such a noise that you didn't hear me. And then you almost shook me to pieces. Billy—finish what you were going to say to me, please!"

"I had finished—almost," he said. He didn't in the least understand. He

was utterly bewildered, and he thought, though he didn't dare to be quite sure, that he was happier than he had ever been in all his life. "I had told you I loved you—and I was trying to ask you to marry me——"

"Yes!" she cried. "Billy—I will marry you! I'd love to! I think I always wanted to—even back in Paris. But I didn't know till just now, when I knew you were poor, just like me. If we're both poor, it's all right, isn't it? Billy—I just couldn't have loved you or any one who had such an awful lot of money——"

Bill did have intuition then. But I don't know that he deserves so very much credit for it. He just took her in his arms. She was so dirty already that the extra dirt she acquired from contact with him didn't matter. And now he knew he was right about his happiness.



### TO ONE ABSENT

OFTTIMES at saddest hour, when breaks the pale gray dawn,  
I waken from my slumber and dear dreams of thee;  
All nature starts to rouse, my blinds aside are drawn,  
Yet enters not the light, the hour is dark for me.

Too soon I realize that I am here alone  
While thou art left in lands where comes nor grief nor pain.  
No pleasures of this world can for thy loss atone.  
I fain must seek thee in the world of dreams again.

LIVINGSTON LUDLOW BIDDLE.




# STORIES OF THE SUPER-WOMEN

BY  
ALBERT PAYSON TERHUNE

Find the Woman. You will find her in almost every generation, in almost every country, in almost every big city—the super-woman. She is not the typical adventuress; she is not a genius. The reason for her strange power is occult. When philosophers have thought they had segregated the cause—the formula—what you will—in one particular super-woman or group of super-women, straightway some new member of the clan has arisen who wields equal power with her notable sisters, but who possesses none of the traits that made them irresistible. And the seekers of formulas are again at sea. What makes the super-woman? Is it beauty? Cleopatra and Rachel were homely. Is it daintiness? Marguerite de Valois washed her hands but twice a week. Is it with Pompadour and Du Barry were avowedly stupid in conversation. Is it youth? Diane de Poitiers and Ninon de l'Enclos were wildly adored at sixty. Is it the subtle quality of femininity? George Sand, who numbered her admirers by the score—poor Chopin in their foremost rank—was not only ugly, but disgustingly mannish. So was Semiramis. The nameless charm is found almost as often in the masculine, “advanced” woman as in the delicate, ultrafeminine damsel. Here are the stories of super-women who conquered at will. Some of them smashed thrones; some were content with wholesale heart-smashing. Wherein lay their secret? Or rather, their secrets? For seldom did any two of them follow the same plan of campaign.

## Madame de Montespan, the “Wild Cat” Heartbreaker.

N ugly and dowdy little queen had a gloriously beautiful maid of honor and a highly susceptible husband. Any one with twenty guesses can figure out what happened and have nineteen guesses left over.

The dowdy little woman was Maria Theresa, a Spanish princess who had been picked out for the gaudy and sorry position of Queen of France.

The husband was his—occasionally—Christian majesty, the *Grand Monarque*—Louis XIV., King of France; a little turkey cock of a man with a strikingly

handsome face, a great, jutting beak of a nose, an enormous periwig, and shoes whose heels had been “built up” to make him seem taller.

The magnificent maid of honor was Mademoiselle Françoise Athénaïs de Tonnay-Charente, daughter of the Duc de Mortemart, a convent-educated girl who, at twenty—in 1661—came to Paris as one of the young queen’s maids of honor.

Athénaïs was tall, splendidly formed, gold of hair, deep blue of eyes, and blessed with a peaches-and-cream complexion. She was also a shrew, a vixen,

a tigress—what you will; probably even a murderess; certainly a dabbler in witchcraft. She had the temper of a wild cat, the beauty of a goddess, the unspeakable and mystic charm of the perfect super-woman. She is known to history as Madame de Montespan.

Before Athénaïs had been out of the convent school for a week, she was the toast of the whole region. When she reached Paris, she promptly became the year's sensation at court. Suitors in shoals clamored for the bliss of wrecking their lives by marrying her.

But she was in no haste to marry. The wise man with ten million dollars to invest does not place it all with the first promoter who approaches him.

She took scant pains to hide or check her furious temper. But a little detail like unsheathed claws did not deter men from making fools of themselves over her. Says one biographer, writing of Athénaïs at this period:

"Her brilliant and haughty beauty was only one of the Montespan's charms. She was a cultured and amusing talker, who won the admiration of such competent judges as Saint-Simon and Madame de Sévigné."

Among the lordlings of the French court who blindly adored Athénaïs was one Pardaillon de Gondrin, Marquis de Montespan. The marquis was a year younger than she. He was handsome and dashing, and was cursed with a fiery temper to match her own. Theirs was the ideal union of tiger and tigress.

In 1663 they were married. And for a few years—for a very, very few years—they lived together far more happily than if one of them had had less of the wild cat in his or her make-up. The marquis was crazily in love with his wonderful wife. And he thought she was quite as much in love with him. Perhaps for a time she was. Perhaps not. They had two children.

In any case, she had her own career to look out for, and she did not intend

to limit that career by going through life as the spouse of a mere marquis. She was growing more beautiful, more dazzlingly fascinating every year, as the increasing number of her admirers proved.

But she gave no more heed to these admirers than an epicure, hastening to a twelve-course dinner, bestows upon the hot-dog vendor at the street corner. For Athénaïs had a goal in sight, a royal goal. And toward that goal, ever since she had come to court, she had been steadily making her way. Daily it grew nearer and nearer. She aspired to be the recognized favorite of his aforesaid not very Christian majesty, Louis XIV., King of France.

At any moment, from the time she was appointed maid of honor, Athénaïs could readily and with startling ease have joined the ranks of pretty women whom the king delighted to dishonor. But that was a rôle she did not covet. There was nothing of the light o' love in her nature; she wanted to be all or nothing. And another woman held the place of "all" just then, a woman whom she did not yet feel herself strong enough to supplant. So she waited—with growing impatience.

Let me say a word or two—not the good old hackneyed, historic stuff, but the more intimate things—about Louis XIV., will you?

His father, Louis XIII., had hated and distrusted his mother, Anne of Austria. And the hatred and distrust had been duly fanned by crafty old Cardinal Richelieu, who chose this way to punish Anne for not having had the good taste to fall in love with his vindictive self and for making a public joke of his suit. I told that story in full in my "Ninon de Lenclos" article.

Louis XIII. and Anne had been married for more than twenty-two years before Louis XIV., their first child, was born. And Louis XIII. had died while his son was a child. Anne secretly



married Richelieu's successor, Mazarin, who was an Italian and horribly stingy.

Little Louis spent his childhood in worse poverty than do most slum children nowadays. In the palace he was brought up by careless servants, slept between ragged and filthy sheets, and ate such scraps of food as he could wheedle the cooks into giving him. It was a horrible childhood.

Then, when he came of age and assumed the real rulership of France, he set out to get back some of the fun he had missed. Mazarin was dead. Anne was a mere pensioner. Louis had free hand. He began to spend money as diligently and conscientiously as Mazarin had hoarded it. His court was aglitter with splendor; gayety ruled supreme; and the young king's audacious love affairs were the talk of all France.

One nobly born damsel after another was the brief heroine of the handsome youth's attentions. State reasons married him to poor little Maria Theresa of Spain. But he bore the marital yoke very lightly. He did not go on the good theory that every man ought to marry at least once for love.

He did not love his wife. He did not pretend to. He neglected her. But he neglected her charmingly. He was always courteous and tender in his treatment of her. He put up most patiently with her many feeble grumblings and complaints. And he arranged his extra-nuptial amours so tactfully—part of the time, at least—that they need never come to her notice—unless she looked for them, which she did.

She was a good little soul, this homely, pathetic Spanish girl, and with a decent husband she would have been a sweet-tempered, lovable wife, domestic and adoring, an excellent spouse for a sixteen-dollar-a-week clerk who was too poor to be immoral and too insignificant to be fascinating and too unimaginative to see his wife's outward

defects. But fate had linked her to a king, not to a clerk, and she was miserable.

She looked on her royal husband as a sun god, to be obeyed and revered humbly and from afar. She could not see why he did not love her, why he would not let her love him, why he was forever mixed up in affairs with other and prettier women. All this wrecked Maria Theresa's pale little life. It turned her mildly sour, since she had not the strength to turn bitter. It did not occur to her gentle soul to rebel or to demand her rights. And she was not great enough to forgive. So she was weakly cranky and irritable and complaining. And you can figure for yourself just how far all that added to her popularity at court and with her gayety-loving husband.

Among his numberless light love affairs, Louis fixed his vagrom fancy for a time on his submoralized sister-in-law, the Duchesse d'Orléans. His brief infatuation was returned. He spent much of his spare time every day at her apartments in the Louvre.

As he wished to avoid a family scandal, it was arranged between the duchess and himself that he pretend to be interested in one of her maids of honor. This, they argued, would serve as ample excuse for his visits.

The maid of honor whom they picked out to serve thus as a blind was a mere child of sixteen—simple-minded, deeply religious, endowed with a fresh loveliness that sprang rather from a sweet heart than from facial beauty. She was the orphaned daughter of a country nobleman. Her name was Louise de la Vallière.

After their first few formal meetings, the king found he was tremendously in love with this innocent, pure-eyed girl. Also that he no longer cared the snap of his finger for his moralless sister-in-law, the Duchesse d'Orléans.

As for Louise, with every atom of

her unworldly and childish nature she had learned to love Louis. She adored him. He was her king; he was her lover; he was all she dreamed of or cared for, here or hereafter. It was the perfect, eternal surrender of a one-man woman.

According to stories of the day—stories which Dumas weaves into his "Vicomte de Bragelonne"—Louise was already betrothed to a young noble, for whom she cared in only a sisterly fashion and whose life was wrecked when the king found pretext to drive him forever from her presence.

Louise was Louis' first serious love. He was not content to mask this affair as he had the others. He made Louise a duchess, and he gave her a suite of apartments at the Louvre. She was the first royal favorite to hold such a recognized position at the palace; the first—and best—of the long line of French *maitresses en titre* which ended with Madame du Barry.

Louise cared nothing for rank, for wealth, for power. She used none of them. All she wanted was to be near Louis, to love him, to serve him, to make him happy. Watson says of her relations with the king: "She was the only human being who really loved him."

For a time, this gentle adoration touched Louis and pleased him. It brought out all that was decent in his putrid soul. But bit by bit he tired of Louise's gentle devotion and began to yearn for spicier diet. Athénaïs de Montespan, watching as a wild cat watches a faltering deer, saw and rejoiced.

"If I were so lost to decency as that woman," primly announced Athénaïs one day, "and if I had made our dear queen so unhappy, I should hide my face from mortal sight and perish of shame."

The cattily hypocritical speech came to the king's ears. Athénaïs saw to

that. And he looked with new interest at the ultravirtuous Madame de Montespan. Virtue always appealed to Louis, even as "Sweet Home" lyrics delight a chronic wife beater.

For this reason or another—some say Athénaïs' words were repeated to her; some that the king had just scolded her wrathfully for refusing to tell him about a love affair between the Duchesse d'Orléans and the Comte de Guiche—Louise suddenly left court and fled to a convent at Chaillot. There weepingly she declared that she was a vile sinner—which she never was—and besought the abbess to let her end her wretched days in a convent cell.

The king learned of Louise's escape. And, as what is lost is ever dearer than when it was ours, he followed post-haste to Chaillot, arriving while Louise was still begging for admittance.

"You know I love you," was his curt-spoken greeting to the sobbing girl. "Come back."

And, sorely against her will, back she came; back to the love she felt was slipping away from her; back to the palace that was beginning to be a prison; back to the court intrigues that Athénaïs and others were busily stirring up against her.

There presently the unhappy woman's worst fears were realized. Inch by inch Athénaïs was crowding her from her place. Louise realized that her day was done, that the man she worshiped was fast getting tired of her. And again she tried to seek refuge at the Chaillot convent. Once more, though this time with less haste, Louis brought her back.

But before long Athénaïs had gained so strong and so subtle a hold upon the king that he yielded to Louise's tears and pleas and let her go from him forever. With a yawn he dismissed this one holy and sweet influence in all his long life; dismissed it without a sigh, throwing away a love that all his wealth

and boundless power could never replace.

As long as Louis had cared for her, Louise had felt she did no wrong in reciprocating his love. He was her king, her god. But the moment he began to tire of her, she looked on herself as a monster of iniquity for the life she had led. She sought to redeem her past by becoming a nun in a Carmelite convent and by filling her remaining years with deeds of charity. She also wrote many religious tracts. One of these—"Reflections on God's Mercy"—is still extant.

She lived to see a good woman's influence rout Athénaïs from Louis' heart, even as the evil influence of Athénaïs had driven Louise from him. She lived almost long enough to learn of her former lover's death at seventy-seven—a senile, outworn, unloved, broken, and disappointed man.

And so gentle Louise de la Vallière passes out of our story; a woman who, by Our Lord's own unbreakable promise, is "forgiven much because she loved much."

Athénaïs was promptly installed in Louise's place as official royal favorite, and all France proceeded to fawn upon her.

But, to every one's amazement, her husband quite failed to appreciate the compliment to his wife. The Marquis de Montespan not only refused to profit by Athénaïs' sin, but he was struck dumb with incredulous rage when he learned what had befallen her. He had not had the faintest suspicion of what was going on, and the news of it smote him like the traditional and overworked thunderbolt.

Presently he found his voice and began to rave. He cursed the king, he cursed Athénaïs, he cursed everybody. He swore vengeance against the man who—"with the consent of the governed"—had stolen his wife. His raging grief clamored to high Heaven.

Yet all the time he must have known—as everybody else knew—that he was as powerless to avenge the theft as is a year-old baby whose doll is stolen by a prize fighter.

The king was—the king. The king could do no wrong—that he could be punished for. What he wanted he could get. And he got it. There was no redress. The king might, at will, take a man's life, a man's wife, a man's liberty. He might even take what was guarded more closely than all three—a man's property. And the victim was helpless. There was no appeal to the state, for had not Louis declared: "I am the state!"

True, there were law processes, of a sort. But with a king like Louis the law meant little more than to a political boss of to-day. The king ruled the nobles. The nobles in turn ruled their peasantry, having in many cases the power of life and death over them. The peasants ruled nothing; not even their squalid families, for the hideous *droit de seigneur* was still more or less in vogue. The grain was slowly but satisfactorily ripening for the Revolution's crimson harvest.

Yes, even so powerful a noble as the Marquis de Montespan stood helpless as his wife was frisked away from him by the king. But he refused to submit gratefully, as did most such husbands. The next day he appeared at a court levee clad from head to foot in the deepest and densest and dreariest black.

"For whom are you in mourning, Monsieur le Marquis?" civilly queried the king.

"For my wife, sire," was the grief-stricken reply. "I loved her. She is dead—worse than dead."

A gasp of amazement ran through the audience room at this daring bit of graveyard repartee. Such a speech was little short of lese majesty. And it was not a circumstance to other things the

despoiled marquis said loudly and in public places.

Louis, in a gust of royal indignation, had the husband arrested and thrown into prison. But Montespan did not stay there long. Ridicule was the one thing Louis could never endure. And ridicule—veiled in his actual presence, but barefaced and rampant elsewhere—stalked abroad through his court. The cynical nobles regarded the situation as sublimely funny. A thousand epigrams an hour were coined.

Moreover, though Louis affected to sneer at "the voice of the people," yet just now that same voice, in street and shop and café, was talking with undue loudness about the man who robbed another of his wife and then imprisoned the victim. The more fearless of the clergy took to preaching sermons wherein they dwelt to an almost treasonable extent on the episode of King David and Uriah the Hittite.

The Marquis de Montespan was fast becoming a hero. This was an awful and perilous example to set to future injured husbands. Louis set him free.

Instantly the marquis resumed his mourning clothes. He draped his house in black, he swathed his servants, his horses, his carriages in crape. He held a public funeral service for his wife, to which obsequies he invited all his relatives and his family friends.

Athénaïs laughed delightedly when word of the funeral was brought to her. She was the first to tell the king the delicious joke. His majesty failed to see the point. He snarled peevishly:

"Now that the pig-headed fool has buried you, I hope he'll have the good taste in future to let you alone."

To prevent any further eccentric outbreaks of protest from the stricken husband, Louis exiled the Marquis de Montespan to Spain. There the marquis made a will in which he spoke of both Louis and Athénaïs in the vilest

possible terms, hoping thus to "stab them from his grave."

Louis, meanwhile, had set the plastic machinery of the law into motion and won for Athénaïs a legal separation from her deserted husband. The king was luckier in gaining the decree than the marquis had been when he applied to the pope for divorce from Athénaïs. His holiness had refused to set such a dangerous precedent and would not grant the divorce upon any terms at all. And here the fiery Marquis de Montespan, like sweet Louise de la Vallière, withdraws, heartbroken, from our story, leaving the field clear to Athénaïs.

That worthy soul, having come into her own, proceeded to have the time of her life. She set her gaudy successors the example of spending royal revenues with both hands. She gambled away four million livres in one night at the card table, in an earnest endeavor to break a run of ill luck. She broke it. The people paid.

Court intrigues attacked her viciously. They fairly boiled against her. One story, for instance, was raked up—and proved—to the effect that she had broken the laws of God and of France by going to a sorceress and buying love charms to win the heart of the king; this while she was still living with De Montespan.

But Louis freely forgave her. Why shouldn't he—being a man—when her resort to witchcraft had been for the purpose of making him respond to her deathless devotion? But the fact that she dabbled in magic was one day to be brought up against her in more tragic form, as you will see.

Athénaïs' father and brother and sister were more complacently worldly-wise than was her rash husband. And, in reward, the father was made governor of Paris and the brother a marshal of France, while the sister—who had but recently ended her novitiate as

a nun—was appointed abbess of the rich Fontevrault Convent. Yes, they were always good to their families, these super-women; and their families, almost without exception, were the sort that would let such women be good to them.

Athénaïs dabbled little in politics, except to help her friends and hurt her foes. But she went in strong as a sponsor of the arts. She was the generous patron, for instance, of such geniuses as Corneille, Racine, La Fontaine, and other immortals of whom every American has heard and whose works not one American in two thousand has read.

Louis tired of Athénaïs almost as quickly as he had tired of Louise. She resorted again to magic. But her court enemies resorted to something stronger—the Church. When next the king went to confession, he was refused absolution unless he would consent to break off his intimacy with Athénaïs de Montespan. In pious zeal, fanned by a feeling of relief, he bade Athénaïs pack up and go. The Church seconded the command.

She went, outwardly meek, curbing—in Louis' presence at least—her wild-cat fury; because she intended to come back.

And back she came before very long. Louis had been tired of her. But when she was away, the haunting memory of her charm still gripped him. So, despite court and Church, he yielded at last to her entreaties and let her return. Being a man of heart, he could not bear to think of her as pining to death for lack of the sunlight of his kingly smile.

Back to court came the triumphant Athénaïs, only to find that in her absence another royal favorite had been installed and that she herself was expected to play second fiddle. The new favorite was Mademoiselle Angelique de Fontanges, though the king's pet

name for her was "La Fosseuse"—"the Girl with the Dimples." Athénaïs was conciliated by an appointment as "superintendent of the queen's household." It must have pleased the queen.

This time Athénaïs' rage seems to have savored of the cobra rather than the wild cat. Presently, and with great suddenness, the Girl with the Dimples died. The old sorcery story was raked up afresh. It was proven that Athénaïs had recently been consulting a magician who was also a skilled poisoner.

In brief, beauteous Athénaïs de Montespan was accused of killing by poison the scarce less beautiful Angelique de Fontanges.

It was a nasty scrape, even for a woman who had now more power than the Queen of France. And as the evidence piled up, Athénaïs' prospects of early death on the scaffold grew brighter every minute.

Then, at the eleventh hour, Louis saved her; partly because of the super-woman power she was still able to exert upon him in this terrible crisis of her fate; partly for the sake of her children, and that the king's seven sons and daughters, whose mother she was, should not be stigmatized as the offspring of an executed murderess.

The king intervened, sent the authorities about their business, and hushed up the whole black scandal. He even retained Athénaïs in favor, arguing that even if she were guilty, she had sinned for love of him. She told him so herself, and she should have known.

She was prolific—for a super-woman—was Athénaïs de Montespan. The boggy of race suicide had no terrors for her. She was the mother of nine children in all.

And she chose as governess for the seven semiroyal youngsters and as "companion" for herself, a woman who—purposely or accidentally—was to be her ruin. This woman was Françoise



d'Aubigné Scarron, widow of a scurrilously merry little hunchback poet.

The king at first found this new governess too grave and high-minded to interest him. Then he noticed her unfailing goodness to his children. Then—he was growing old—he began to find it pleasanter sometimes to listen to her calmly ennobling talk than to the highly spiced conversation of Athénaïs. Also, her goodness and the air of restful strength that enwrapped her were a grateful contrast to the blazing temper of Madame de Montespan.

So gradually Louis grew to depending on Françoise's companionship. First he raised her salary from twenty-seven hundred francs to twenty-seven hundred crowns. Then he ennobled her, making her "Madame de Maintenon."

Presently he suggested to her that she would prove a most acceptable successor to Athénaïs. Madame de Maintenon declined the royal offer—without thanks.

Athénaïs had plenty of spies. She heard what Louis had done, and this time there was not tact or common sense enough in all her nature to curb the wild-cat temper.

She burst in upon the king; called him a pompous old windbag; compared him to a strutting turkey cock; made furious mock of his most cherished little failings; cursed him like any fishwife; and—so runs one story—wound up the screechingly maniacal scene by snatching off his majesty's huge periwig from his bald and bumpy head and throwing it into his kingly face. This in the presence of a dozen courtiers and servants.

Oh, a most deplorable scene! One that had never occurred before in all French history. About a century later, of course, the French people took off the head of Louis' great-great-etc.-grandson. But that caused less local

consternation than the taking off of the *Grand Monarque's* sacrosanct periwig.

Had I written, and had AINSLEE'S published, this anecdote in France, in 1691—the year that it happened—I should have been put to death very promptly and publicly and painfully; in the enforced company of the magazine's editor. And AINSLEE'S offices would most assuredly have been razed to the ground; to the lasting misfortune of several hundred thousand readers.

I mention this to explain why the story of Athénaïs' rage fit did not find its way into print until Louis was safely dead. But all France knew of it, none the less, and jabbered feverishly about it—in tense whispers and at a safe distance from the Louvre.

Athénaïs de Montespan, like most other fiery folk, had lost her temper just once too often. It killed her career.

When she had insulted the queen, in a hot blaze of anger, when she had furiously reviled the memory of sweet Louise de la Vallière, when she had confessed to dabbling in the forbidden practice of witchcraft, when she had been accused of actual murder—her wondrous charm and the king's vanity had won quick forgiveness for her. But when her wild-cat temper dared show its claws against Louis himself, and when, above all, her sharp, high heels trampled upon the corns of his best-loved vanities and foibles—that was the end.

Louis had conquered nearly all Europe—through the prowess of his marshals. He had made his court the most brilliant on earth—through the brilliancy of his courtiers. He had caused the dawn of France's Golden Age—through the genius of the artists and writers and philosophers and statesmen and economists who chanced to live just then. He had achieved two even more sparkling exploits—he had intro-

duced coffee into France and he had set a new fashion in wigs.

And such a man was not to be forced to hear the truth about himself from any woman alive. At least not with impunity.

Athénaïs was banished to a convent, and the king brought his smirched vanity to Madame de Maintenon to be polished back to its former radiance. So well did Madame de Maintenon perform this easy task that soon after the queen's death, Louis married her.

Athénaïs was more than fifty years old when Louis sent her to the convent. She was still beautiful, still alluring, still wholly adorable. But her day was done. Louis was all-powerful. Even the most audacious wooer dared not risk the kingly displeasure by making love to the woman who was under the monarch's ban. Nor, having ruled a king, did Athénaïs care to stoop to smaller fry.

She did all that was left to her. She

turned to charity, as a duck to water. She spent her sixteen remaining years and the bulk of her one-hundred-thousand-dollar yearly pension in good deeds. How far these worthy actions succeeded in padding the credit side of her page in the recording angel's ledger some theologian can tell you better than I.

Louis paid the pension—or, rather, he let the public treasury pay it—but he never forgave her; and he would never again see her. When she died in 1707, he even let his petty spite go so far as to forbid her children to wear mourning for their disgraced mother.

I wonder if you feel at all sorry for Athénaïs? *I can't.*

The January number of AINSLEE'S will contain the next article in Mr. Terhune's Super-Woman series: "Mary, Queen of Scots: Double Queen and Multiple Siren"



## RUINED

ONCE he was a wanderer, once he was a fighter,  
 Once he was a knight of high romance,  
 Following adventure just as far as he could sight her,  
 Plunging life and fortune on a chance!

Once he played with destiny, truculent and merry,  
 Once he roved the world by land and sea;  
 Now he rides contentedly on the Jersey ferry,  
 Commonplace and placid as can be.

Once he was a rover and a prince of princely men,  
 Leading fights or frolicings with vim;  
 Now he nods at dinner and he goes to bed at ten.  
 And that's what Mr. Cupid's done to him!

BERTON BRALEY.



## THE ETERNAL MASCULINE

By FLAVIA ROSSER

**H**ILARY COCHRANE had cared neither for the Canadian wilderness, into which he had plunged, nor for the world he had left behind, until he came to know Rose Marie. Then suddenly, because of her, he sang with the wind and communed with the sky, he aspired with the arrowy pines, he leaped with the seething rapids; in short, he lived anew because of her.

Then, just when he was at full tide of this consciousness of power, Rose Marie dealt a deathblow to it all. She told him that he was the same to her as any other man—and no more. The emptiness of life after that was infinitely worse than had been the ignorance of it before.

Seraphé the Turtledove—as all who came to the tavern she kept called the Widow la Tourterelle—was disappointed. She scolded the girl roundly that afternoon. But, of course, thought Rose Marie, the real poignancy of the situation, and its bitterness, did not penetrate the understanding of Seraphé. To one as young as Rose Marie, the fat widow seemed far too remote from youth and too much engrossed in middle-aged kitchen cares to understand.

"But why are you not kinder to the beautiful Mr. Cochrane?" the older woman asked of her ward.

"Because he is too kind to me," the girl replied.

"He is somebody that is something out in the world," declared Seraphé, "for otherwise he would not be accepted here as the bosom friend of Father Renaud, and of the great M'sieu le Commandant."

"Nor of the great Chief Potapkin," echoed the girl, with light and scornful laughter, as she remembered the stiff and stork-legged figure of the old Indian, Potapkin, last chief of a dying people.

"You are a naughty trifter," said Seraphé sternly. "She who plays with the fire of love shall certainly have her fingers burned. Love is the only thing in life. I am old and fat, but I have had my dream. I could weep out my eyes this minute if I had the time. But no—to-morrow is the day for the boat to come down from St. Christophe's, and I must make brioche to feed those boatmen on. Yet I should not complain at their coming, for it is lonely enough that we are here, with the men all so far away at the lumber camp."

"Yes," answered Rose Marie pensively, but with malice. "It is dull indeed, with every one away except Mr. Hilary Cochrane and those old, old men. I shall be glad to see even that one-legged boat captain, Jean Boly, come hopping in."

Seraphé's handsome face clouded slightly.

"Every one of any importance is here," she answered haughtily, "when Mr. Cochrane and the great commandant, Monsieur Beausoliel, are at home. They are the biggest men of all—they and Father Renaud."

"Yes, they and Potapkin," cried the roguish Rose Marie. "They and the great Bobo, negro servant to the greater commandant."

Seraphé moved ponderously off down the boarded cavern that served as hall-way to the agency inn, and her thoughts were busy as she went.

"Ah, what a cruelty of fate it is," she murmured, "that I must stay in the kitchen, making sweet bread for one-legged Jean Boly, when I might be making, instead, gay conversation on the gallery outside with Monsieur Beausoliel. He has always a smile for me, and many a pleasant word."

As for Rose Marie's smile, it died away as her old nurse disappeared. In spite of her gayety, forest life was strange and lonely for little Rose Marie, whose days, even in the city from which she came, had been so brief and uneventful that as yet she did not know true love when she met it face to face.

And as for Hilary Cochrane, he hardened his heart as best he could when he left her.

"She is only a woman," he told himself; "and as for me, I will be a man."

His first thought, therefore, was to seek out masculine company and prove his virility and his hardness of heart. Who better for that purpose, he reasoned, than Monsieur le Commandant.

To be sure, since the fort had been moved up the river years before, Monsieur le Commandant had elected to stay at the settlement, and had not been in command of anything in particular—unless it be remembered that he commanded the affection and admiration of all who knew him. He had been a

brave man, and he was still a handsome one; and very benevolent.

"Have no fear, little friends," he was wont to say, as he went like a perambulating sun among them, dispensing warmth and glee. Considering his magnificent height and his girth, which almost equaled it, he might have been a loving ogre, about to devour them all.

Usually he walked flanked on one side, or both, by an admiring friend. The two most often favored were the priest, Father Renaud, and the old Chief Potapkin. But since the coming of young Hilary Cochrane, who had won the hearts of all, one or the other had often made way for *him*.

That day, after Hilary left Rose Marie, he met the commandant and the priest in the sunlit, moss-paved road, as they came from the old barracks above. As the three went on, they came across Potapkin, sitting in the door of his little tobacco shop, and he rose and joined them. Each in his turn, the chief and the priest and the soldier, looked kindly on their young companion. Something virile in him appealed to what they were—or had been.

"This little community is safe as long as we are here to protect it," declared the commandant cheerfully. "It has neither foes without nor famine within. What could ever prevail against us? There was never a foeman braver than I or fiercer than Potapkin."

"Uh-huh; fierce," assented Potapkin.

"And see," continued the commandant, "how the golden bounty of the sun is spilled along the roadside, and how it floats, too, upon the surface of the river! The good God gives it; it is *His* sunshine. That is *His* cask of wine, there on the back gallery of Madame Tourterelle, and it is *His* squirrel pie, also, on the shelf above it."

"Uh-huh; pie," agreed Potapkin.

"Yes," replied the priest abstractedly, as one who saw a vision, "although we

dwell in the wilderness, we are the children of light."

"We are 'brothers to dragons and companions to owls,'" quoted Hilary, with forced animation, wishing, also, to seem brave and cheerful.

The phrase struck Monsieur Beausoliel favorably.

"That is a true saying," he cried, with fervor. "The forest has no terrors for this four. To-morrow we will go on a grand hunt together. And then we will prove that we are indeed 'brothers to dragons and companions to owls.'"

"Uh-huh! Hunt owls!" chuckled Potapkin.

And so they planned it. It was, according to the Indian, the height of the hunting season in the hills downstream. It was always the height of the season in those hills to Potapkin. As he thought about it, Hilary grew as anxious for the venture as was the old Indian. Those hills should be a burying ground for old hopes and a hunting ground for new. He would go off with these fine and daring men of the wilderness and forget the soft blandishments of women in general and of Rose Marie in particular.

Only for a moment were the four deterred at all in their purpose, and that was just at the last, as they went down the next day to the wooden wharf, where their boats lay. Then it was that Seraphé came out on the porch of the inn and arraigned them severely. How could they, she demanded, go off in this way, when all the other men were at the logging? There would be no one left at the agency at all but women and squaws. She had not thought such a thing possible of such a gallant soldier, and she looked reprovingly at Monsieur Beausoliel.

The soldier looked longingly after Hilary, who was moving on to the wharf, not wishing to encounter Rose Marie. He felt that he must make some defense, and so he spoke up boldly.

"Madame," he said, with a flourish, "we are mighty hunters, but we are at your service. We are true men and fearless, and the danger of ladies is our delightful opportunity. If danger threatens you in any way whatever, do you but send word to us, and we will return immediately. Let me think, now. To-morrow we will be at the Cave of the Bat, to the southward. On the day behind to-morrow, we will be at the big bayou. And the third day—it shall, I assure you, see our return. Yes, now that I think it over, I know that at about this hour of the third day, we shall be at the Painted Rock, not many miles below here, on our return."

Seraphé's eyes were black with indignation, and she said nothing. So the commandant backed off, bowing.

"We will be consumed with anxiety, then, to again behold you ladies," he continued. "Indeed, we live but to return to you."

Seraphé turned and joined Rose Marie within the entry, but she could not resist a glance toward the landing.

"He has of presumption a cheekful!" she murmured. "But, heavens, what a smile, and what a figure!"

Rose Marie did not follow the other's glance, nor did she answer. She took great care in counting the stitches in her knitting, and, when she did speak, she said that for her part she did not care whether *any man* ever came back, and that, indeed, she was much happier *without him*.

The soldier and the priest, sitting in the canoe on the sliding current of the black-green river, spoke admiringly of young Cochrane's oarsmanship. Indeed, Bobo, the black boy, who was paddling the old Indian in a lighter craft, could scarcely keep up with them; and so, with long, sliding leaps, in a perfect glissade of motion, the two canoes sped on to the southward.

Arrived at their first camp, too, the four were quite as happy as they had



thought that they would be. They stood there in the forest's depths and looked about them. They were drunken with the wine of the crystal airs above. A cask of grosser draft lay forgotten in the boat below. They turned clear and intimate eyes upon each other, and told boastful tales of past days of hunting.

"I have seen ducks float like snow-flakes on the marsh, there, at one pouf of my gun," declared Monsieur le Commandant.

"Oh, ho!" cried Potapkin. "Big game I took in my young days here. Once I leaped me from the horn of that very rock, there, to the head of a bull deer in the hollow. I bestrode him—I rode him—I threw him down! I broke his heart with one blow of my foot, and tore his horns apart with my hands so—so!"

"As for me," said the priest, "I have taken hares from the upland and beavers from the bayou. My heart is soft; I wept as they struggled. Yet, even as I wept—such is the spell the forest puts upon me—I set the trap again."

Bobo, the black boy, secure in the freemasonry of the forest, spoke also.

"Me," he said, "I fought a catfeesh, once on a time in a bayou. He was as long a feesh as I am. His black sides heave 'em up an' downy. I fought heem over log an' water weed an' san' bar—an' at last I teck heem in my arms."

Remembrance grew upon the old chief, and he swung round and round on tiptoe.

"Once, brothers," he chanted, "I stood upon this spot here, and beheld a something that writhed and twisted and beat its wings above me in the air. And, as it fell lower, I saw that it was half bird and half snake, and that, half against half, it was at battle there on high. A bird had lifted up a snake, and, feather and scale, they writhed, fang and claw they fought, and bright eye glistened into bright eye."

"What did you do?" cried Hilary. "What did you do?"

"I swung me out on tiptoe, so—and then I shot an arrow into the air."

"And then?" cried Hilary. "And then?"

"The arrow brought them to the ground at my feet, but I had already given them death for death. There they lay—crushed fang, torn wing, and hollow eye."

"Brothers," observed the priest, after a pause, "we are as invincible as dragons, indeed."

"Dragons, indeed!" echoed Potapkin, with understanding, now.

Their first day alone at the agency, the women were busy with their usual duties, and the time passed very well. On the second day, they visited from cabin to cabin, and were miserably happy together. On that second afternoon they met at the inn, and drank wild-herb tea and ate some of the sweet bread Seraphé had baked for the boatmen, who had not arrived. When the boat, now long overdue, should really come, they knew that they would have real tea—tea to drink—and they talked of it with joy. Only now and then did any fright appall them, or the feeling come over them that they must have sight of a man or that they must run and hide themselves behind a spreading mackinaw and a squirrel-skin cap.

But upon the morning of the third day, a feeling of fear and a vague unrest shook the dozen women of the deserted camp. It was an eerie day, and one on which something seemed to threaten in silence rather than in sound. A light wrack of clouds raced quietly above, the river raced sullenly below, and a silvery light brooded over all.

"It is out of such a sky," said Seraphé, "that strange and unexpected things occur."

And at noon something unexpected and strange did occur. A watcher spied

what she thought was the boat coming down. She called the others, and they soon saw clearly that it was not the boat, but something broken and disjointed—a mere wreck of what the boat had been. It was evident that the old bateau had gone to pieces somewhere on the rocks above, and was now coming down past them, bit by bit.

They called Seraphé, and she brought Rose Marie, and they all stood together at the water's edge. The water in the rocky channel was shallow, except in the middle, where a deeper current churned itself to foam. But even in the shallows, black and cruel boulders cut the water into whirling pools. It was Seraphé who first made out the fact that there was a man's figure in the nearing wreckage; whether dead or alive, she could not tell.

"The boatmen are not there," she said, "but poor old Jean Boly, of the one leg and the one eye, is coming in! This way and that, he is coming in! Rolling this way and that in the water, he is coming in!"

"And there is no man to save him?" cried the distracted women. "No man to save him as he goes by!"

"I am no *man*," said Seraphé, rearing her magnificent figure upward. "I am no brother to dragons, nor companion piece to owls, as the saying is, but save him I will, if the good God means that he shall be saved!"

As she spoke, she stooped and seized a coil of rope that lay upon the edge of the wharf and threw it over the shoulders of Rose Marie.

"Follow me," she commanded the girl sharply, "and play out the rope as you go."

"But, oh," cried Rose Marie, shuddering, her lovely eyes wide and blue, "I am afraid of the fish! They might touch me with their tails! I never went into the water before!"

Seraphé la Tourterelle heeded her not. Undeterred by her vast bulk, the

indomitable woman crossed the shallows, wading now knee-deep, now deeper, in the foaming tide. Rose Marie, gasping, but devoted, kept close at her side. The girl realized that the older woman might easily lose her footing, and that somebody must be close at hand. She fixed her eyes upon the helpless man on the bit of wreckage, which, released from the last rock that held it, now bore down upon them.

Rose Marie did not care to save old Jean Boly. Oh, she thought, if it were but somebody that she did want to save! Suddenly, in a flash, she wondered if there were rapids and cruel rocks down the river, where Hilary Cochrane had gone. Seraphé had taken the rope.

"Attend!" she called now, sharply, and she poised her massive figure for the throw.

The great rope fell just short of crossing the narrow channel. Seraphé cast it again, wading a little farther in. Rose Marie followed, and the water went to their waists. This time the cable fell straight across the current, and Jean Boly, arriving, caught hold upon it. But he was too weak to do more than clasp it desperately, and hang on.

"Pull!" cried Seraphé. "Pull for your life, Rose Marie!"

So they drew in the rope, and brought Jean Boly to the first rim of rock, past the shallows, and to the shore. Then, with gentle hands and admiring glances, the women led the three—the rescuers and the rescued—up the road. Once at the inn, there was plenty for every one to do; there were fires to build, garments to bring, hot drinks to brew. Of course, Jean Boly was not much of a protector, at best, and utterly useless now, yet for the first time since they had been left alone, the women were happy and at peace.

When Jean Boly was bolstered up in front of the fire, in an armchair, he grew mournful. When they brought

him hot herb tea and rum, he wagged his head sadly, and, after he had drunk his fill, he wept into the corner of Seraphé's flowered dressing gown.

"Oh, la! Oh, la!" he wailed. "It has gone down! It is lost!"

"What?" they asked. "The boat?"

"No."

"The tea? The mail?"

"No."

"What, then?"

"My mascot, my precious mascot! And I was bringing it, Seraphé la Tourterelle, to you!"

Jean Boly offered no further explanation than this of his grief; and most of the women laid it to the herb tea and the rum. As for Rose Marie, she gave it no thought at all. She sat silent, wringing the water from her black braids and shrugging her damp pink shoulders. She was still wondering about the nature of the river at the Painted Rock, and whether it was cold and treacherous and full of jagged boulders veiled in whirling foam.

The four hunters—the soldier, the priest, the chief, and Hilary Cochrane—attended by the faithful Bobo, returned to Painted Rock, which was half a day's journey below the camp, by noon of that third day. They were somewhat dispirited and silent as they came. It was not that they had had no luck. No, they had shot quite enough game to appease their hunger, to uphold their reputations, and to assuage their desire for sport. They were merely dispirited because they were so fully satisfied.

They were to take to the boats again there at Painted Rock. Before embarking, they lunched meagerly, and talked intermittently about many things. The day was as eerie there at the edge of the forest as it had seemed to the lonely women at the camp above. A strange, silvery light lay between the sullen river and the flying wrack of

clouds high in the sky. The four men felt the day's influence, and showed it in their conversation. They talked of unearthly things, of signs, omens, portents, and occult mysteries.

Even Bobo found a humble place in the talk, for these were subjects that he loved.

"Deliber me," said Bobo; "from ever meeting up with a conjur cat. If you jes' see heem, you get trouble; an' touch heem, you're dead!"

"Shut up, and bring the boat about," said Hilary wearily. He was very tired, and he had not found what he had gone for.

"I smell trouble," announced the old Indian, standing up and wrinkling his nose to the windward.

"That is truly a strange sky, and portentous," said the churchman.

"Come, come, my friends!" said Monsieur le Commandant, still dignified, but frowning. "Let us be turning homeward. Home is the best place in the time of danger." And, going down to the landing, he chose as comfortable and safe a seat as the larger boat afforded.

But the memory of the fearsome tales they had been telling stayed with the hunters as the boats plowed their way up the river, and the banners of mist that trailed down occasionally, and the souging wind that rose up behind them, did little to abate their uneasiness. They all felt that something had happened somewhere, or was about to happen. Under and about them continually slid the clear waves of the channel. In the smoother stretches of water beyond, myriads of scalelike ripples formed, and then broke into the air in whorls of light. All eyes were fixed upon the water, and it held their thoughts also by its hypnotic gleam.

The old chief, who knelt in the bow of the lighter boat, was the first to see arise from the water something that smote him, at first sight, with a wild,

unreasoning fear. As he looked upon it, his eyes became fixed, his forehead knotted, his whole expression wild. He—poor Indian—had never before seen what he then beheld. The thing he saw was not so large as a wild cat of the woods, but it was much more weird in form; it was not a snake, but sinuous; not human, but smiling as only human beings smile; not a devil, but diabolic in the extreme. It came straight toward the boats, seeming to walk upon the waves and to bow with their undulations. After all, how should these forest children know that this was but Jean Boly's mascot, which he mourned as lost? How were they to know that he had gotten a cat, a real, civilized, old-world cat, at St. Christophe's, and that now it was lightly riding a bit of wreckage down the stream?

"Hi-yi!" yelled Potapkin, and, "Wow-wow!" echoed Bobo.

Their outcry startled Monsieur le Commandant, who woke from a fitful sleep in the bow of the larger boat. When the great man saw the little demon dancing on the water, he, too, gave way to superstitious fear; and it was then that the cat answered with a wail that seemed—even to the priest and to Hilary—a cry from a far-off home between them and which wide seas and a lifetime rolled.

The larger boat began to rock wildly with emotion, and Hilary had all that he could do to keep it on its way. Potapkin and Bobo began wildly to put the other boat about.

"What is it?" cried Father Renaud. "What is it, I say?"

"Hit's a conjur cat!" moaned Bobo. "Hit's a hoodoo! Touch heem, an' you're dead!"

The cat stood now directly in their path. Without warning, it suddenly curved its furry spine and sprang lightly to the bow of the oncoming boat. Poising there for an instant, it shook its head until its yellow eyes seemed

to whirl in a fiery ring. Then it walked along the boat's edge toward the nearest man.

"Ugh-huh!" shuddered Potapkin, and stiffened where he knelt. He had never had an animal approach him before of its own free will, much less woo him, as this one did, with caresses and song. It wound in and out like a friendly serpent between his knees; it clasped its claws deep into his moccasined feet; and, as it did so, it rumbled and buzzed inside like the dry skin drum of the medicine man.

The animal's motions and its song were strange to the savage, and he stood looking down on it in trembling dismay. It grew but the more affectionate. Its mouth spread in an elastic smile, its weird song titillated up and down the great chief's spine, and he felt its damp and clinging kiss upon his hanging hand.

"Hi-yi!" he shouted. "It kisses! It sings!" He leaped into the air, regardless of the rocking boat. "Hi-yi!" he repeated. "Take it away!"

"Wow-wow!" echoed Bobo. "It is a conjur cat!"

Hilary, resting for a moment on his paddle, was puzzled, too; even he felt a thrill of "superstitious awe. But he reached under the seat and drew out a leathern game bag.

"Catch the little brute," he said, "and put it in this bag!"

But Bobo only groaned, and Potapkin yelled again, as the little animal, winding this way and that, clasped his ankles like a hand of steel in a velvet glove. With a quick movement, Hilary brought up the larger boat until its side grated against the other.

"Now catch it!" he cried, appealing to the priest and the soldier.

The priest protested, shrinking away.

"I may not," he said, "touch anything unholy."

Monsieur le Commandant hesitated

for a moment, and then proved himself a hero. Leaning over the boat's edge, he grasped the cat by one leg, and, when it sought to draw away, by yet another; and so on around, until he had it completely vanquished; and then, having thus subdued it, he took it and thrust it deep into the game bag. This done, he rose up triumphant, and laid the bag across the seat of the canoe.

"Sit on the mouth of that bag!" he sternly commanded Bobo, "and by all that your life is worth do not move from it!"

Too terrified to do otherwise than obey, Bobo sat on the mouth of the bag for the rest of the journey; and if it had not been for a tiny air hole in the bag's end, that would have been the last hour of a fine black cat.

All the way home, the spirits of the hunters rose higher and higher. They had proved that they were all they claimed to be, and more. They had tried their prowess against the black powers of superstition, as well as against the dangers of the forest. Even Hilary felt pride in the way he had managed the boat, and in his secret heart he wished that Rose Marie had been there to see him.

But, as a cruel fate would have it, when the boat touched the wharf and the women hastened down to meet it, Rose Marie kept back of Seraphé la Tourterelle, and would not look at him at all. Then, besides that, Monsieur Beausoliel got all the honor. As was his wont, he took full charge of affairs, and superintended the landing. When they all stood on the wharf, in the admiring gaze of the women, he formed them into a triumphal procession.

"Now, my young friend," he said to Hilary, "carry the guns with care, I beg of you. And you, father, follow with the water cask and the baskets. I will walk next, and behind me shall come Bobo, carrying the fearful thing that we have taken. Ladies," he con-

tinued, turning to the women, "we have made a wonderful conquest."

With trembling, Bobo brought the leathern bag and stood beside them.

"What is it? Oh, what is it, pray?" cried the women.

"My little friends, do not tremble," said Monsieur le Commandant. "Are we not here to protect you? Once again we have proved ourselves to be fearless men and true brothers to dragons. There is nothing left for you to have fear of. We have captured the creeping danger of the forest, the haunting horror of the river. We have captured it, and brought it with us!"

"And, oh, what is it?" cried the awed and respectful women.

"It is," replied Monsieur le Commandant, "a conjur cat—a hoodoo. It is in the leathern bag, there, upon the mouth of which Bobo is sitting. It was crafty, but we outdid its cunning; it was strong, but we took it without bloodshed; and it was this hand that did it—this hand that is always at your service."

At the conclusion of his magnificent gesture, the speaker turned to Bobo.

"Get up now, Bobo," he commanded, "and let us carry it to some place where it may be confined securely."

At this point the indomitable Seraphé strode forward. Her nerves were frayed with the day's excitement, and for the first time in her life she felt irritated at Monsieur le Commandant.

"It cannot be so very terrible," she announced, "or it could not be confined in a game sack. Come, come, Bobo! Let us look upon it!" And, so saying, she bodily set aside the unprotesting Bobo.

Then, with one heaving upward of the folds of the game bag, the cat escaped, and stood among them. The fine fellow was slightly dazed, but all undaunted. He stretched his sleek length up and down in the sunshine. But the



sight of him was too much for Popapkin.

"Hi-yi!" he yelled, and leaped to the side of the roadway.

The other men drew back involuntarily, also, but the women rushed forward and closed in about the newcomer.

The cat looked up and smiled at them—such a sweet smile of friendship. His black coat glistened as he undulated in the sunlight. He sheathed and unsheathed his tiny claws from pure pleasure in the meeting; and then the women burst into a torrent of exclamations, into pleasant, endearing words that fairly tumbled over each other.

"Oh, a cat!" they cried. "A precious cat!" And, "Oh, the dear, dear cat!"

At these greetings, the cat buzzed and rattled like a dry skin drum, and continued to smile his pleasant smile upon them.

"Oh, hear it sing!" they cried. "Is not that the sweetest of music?" And then they caught the little animal and handed it from one to another.

"Come to me, sweet eyes," and "Give it to me, the darling! I had forgotten how soft the fur is, and the little stinging touch of the whiskers!"

"I had one just like it in Montreal. I claim it."

"But so did I down in the States! I claim it!"

This, and much else, they said, as they passed the cat from one to another, those poor, starved women, who had had no household pets since they had come into the forest. Presently, they bethought themselves that they might feed it, that, indeed, the poor beast must be hungry.

"Bring milk!" cried Seraphé. "On my table is a tin just open."

"Give it your ribbon, Rose Marie!" cried some one; and Rose Marie, all

else forgetting, took off her velvet neck band and tied it about the neck of the visitor whom all would honor. All of these movements, too, the men were observing, as they stood by, forgotten.

"What is that that is there?" There came a little voice shrilling, the voice of a child who had been born in the forest.

"That that is there is a cat!" cried the enraptured Seraphé.

Just then, in the path, there appeared a new figure. It was poor one-legged Jean Boly, still trailing the flowered dressing gown of Seraphé.

"Seraphé," he cried, "that is my mascot! It is the house cat I was bringing down to you from St. Christophe's!"

That night, the gallery of the inn was the setting for two romantic episodes, both of which may be said to have been brought about by the "conjur cat," in his capacity of a hoodoo. That night, Monsieur le Commandant, won by the comfort of the inn after his stay in the forest, realized what a magnificent woman was Seraphé la Tourterelle, and so he told her. But Seraphé would not listen.

"Monsieur le Commandant," she said, among other things, "I am to marry Jean Boly. A woman likes to have a man whom she can pity sometimes, and upon whom she can waste her love in service. She could not do so with a companion to owls and a brother to dragons."

Rose Marie and Hilary were in the darkness, close by, and they overheard her.

"Oh, that is true," Rose Marie whispered. "I didn't love you at all until I took pity on your despair at my answer. But now, oh, poor little Hilary, how I love you!"

And, so saying, she stooped and kissed him.



# THE DAUGHTER PAYS MRS. BAILLIE REYNOLDS

## CHAPTER I.

**T**HE full sunshine of late June, tempered somewhat by the London atmosphere, illuminated the long art gallery.

It was a pay-day afternoon, and there were, in consequence, but few visitors. The expanse of polished floor glimmered under the summer light, which touched with brilliance every angle of the exquisite bits of buhl furniture arranged about beneath the masterpieces of the brush.

The space, the solitude, the silence and sunshine, emphasized and threw into strong relief the delicate figures of two girls deep in contemplation before the portrait of Isabella, wife of Paul de Vos.

They struck a modern note that yet was in harmony with their stately surroundings. They were as typical of today as those were of yesterday. In a word, they were masterpieces, living exemplars of an age of luxury and completeness that has much affinity with the day when Nattier painted his *haute noblesse*. They seemed enthroned above the sordidness of tradesmen's books, underpaid seamstresses, underground toilers, or any other consideration of ways and means. They seemed just the fine flower of their epoch, as unconscious as the lilies of the field of their own supreme selfishness.

These two young girls evidently belonged to the class that a novelist of our own day has so happily described as "expensive." Their pale summer raiment, gleaming hair, subtle hats, suggested French maids, motor cars, the lap of luxury.

One was of the petite type, gypsy brown, and captivating from the tip of her plumes to the shoes and stockings that matched her gown. The other was of larger mold—not big, but finely formed, long and lithe, with the grace of the modern Atalanta. She was fair, and her face, wide across the brow and tapering at the chin, seemed designed to make an involuntary appeal to the heartstrings of any man.

Her every movement was graceful and gracious. The way she stood, the modeling of the slim ankles which the fashion of the day made visible, the turn of her wrist as she held her catalogue, all had something statuesque about them. Yet she did not seem at all self-conscious, and her eyes were fixed in absorbed attention upon the picture before her.

A man who entered, with halting step, from the adjoining gallery, shot a keen glance around him and stopped short; apparently with the intention of admiring, from a respectful distance, these two nymphs, so artfully enhanced by their rich and heavy surroundings.

He was not a young man, and his dress, for London, was negligent. He wore a long black mustache, which gave him a slightly out-of-date, or provincial, aspect. His black hair showed some gray at the temples, and he limped slightly as he walked. The unattractive part of him was his expression; and as he regarded the unconscious girls, its unpleasantness became accentuated. A curious look, like a flash of recognition, flashed across his dark face. He moved forward slowly, his attention, to all appearance, fixed upon the paintings, until he was quite close to these, the only other persons in the gallery—close enough to overhear their talk.

They had moved on to Mierevelt's lovely portrait of the young, nameless lady in the large ruff, and the smaller, darker girl remarked to her companion:

"What a fancy dress that would make for you! The little bit of stiffened lace round the back of her hair is an inspiration!" Then, as her companion did not reply: "Virginia! Did you hear?"

The lame man started, or, as it were, winced slightly at the sound of the name; yet a certain satisfaction crept into his eyes, as of one who inwardly reflects, "I thought so! I knew I could not be mistaken."

Virginia, thus appealed to, brought down her dreamy gaze from the portrait of the burly burgomaster who sits with his small son.

"I was thinking about that man and his wife, Mims. I always like to look at portraits of married people. I was wondering how they got on together—what kind of temper she had—and so on. But this girl is sweet, isn't she? Is that gold embroidery down the front of her gown? Oh, what a ruff!"

"For you, my dear! You could wear it, all right! You have a throat! But I'm always wondering what little people like me did in the days when you

had all that between your chin and your chest."

Virginia laughed merrily.

"No, Mims, you weren't made for a ruff! But you can wear all those lovely Venetian reds and ambers that I can't touch——"

She was speaking eagerly, wholly unaware of a listener, and, turning to point across the gallery to a picture that exemplified the colors she meant, she brushed slightly against the lame man, who was standing within a few feet of her. He stepped back, raising his hat in acknowledgment of her gentle apology, and his eyes, full of something between hostility and contempt, met hers hardily, as if in a challenge, for a puzzling instant before he turned away and limped to another place.

Virginia's color rose and her lips set, as if an unspoken insult had reached her. She was not used to reading hostility in the eyes of men. She recovered, however, in a moment, and continued her study of the pictures, moving around for some minutes longer, until Mims, leaning near her, murmured:

"Shall we go into the next room? There's a custodian there."

"Yes, let's go and look at the Greuzes," replied Virginia.

It was not long before the unknown man followed them. He was now more careful, however, and kept his eyes for the beauties of the catalogue instead of allowing them to roam toward the beauties of his own day.

"I don't think he meant to be rude," presently said Virginia doubtfully. "He looked at me almost as if he thought he knew me—as if he expected me to speak to him."

"My dear, it is evident that you must never be allowed to go about London alone," laughed Mims. "I'm sure he is edging around here now."

"Nonsense!"

"There's a portrait of you," said Mims mischievously, pausing before

Greuze's picture entitled "Innocence"—the picture with the lamb.

It was true—the likeness was striking. Virginia even colored slightly as she gazed.

"Chocolate box!" said she disdainfully. "I'd far rather be like Isabella de Vos!"

As she spoke, she moved away, with her undulating grace, the lame man having again approached nearer than was quite consistent with good manners.

"That's the worst of you, Virginia—you can't go about without dragging backward the heads of all the men that pass," said Mims in injured tones.

"Talk about glass houses!" was her friend's sarcastic response; and she added, with a little sigh: "Well, you won't long be troubled. Cinderella's clock strikes to-morrow, and I go back to Wayhurst and my native obscurity."

Miriam's soft dark eyes clouded.

"Native obscurity! Virginia, I could cry when I think of you mewed up in that wee brick box of a villa, and remember that it's not much more than two years ago since we were staying with you at Lissendean."

"Don't, Mimsie, for pity's sake! It can't be helped, you know. And, of course, it isn't half as bad for me as for poor mother."

Mims made a grumpy sound. She was depressed, not only by her friend's impending departure, but by the thought of that friend's destiny.

Virginia Mynors, in the days when she and Miriam Rosenberg had been at school together, had been queen of everything. She was the elder daughter of a county gentleman; her clothes had come from the best places; she had taken all the "extras"—riding, swimming, hunting—with no more thought of ways and means than her present appearance led one to suppose.

During the weary days of her father's long illness—a kind of creeping

paralysis that had lasted for two years—Virginia had known that he had money troubles. But though she had been his devoted nurse and trusted secretary, she had been no more prepared than had her butterfly mother for the state of financial catastrophe revealed at his death.

The solid ground had failed beneath her feet. Everything was gone. Even Lissendean, the home in which she had been born, was mortgaged. They had moved out, the house had been let, and upon the few hundreds a year received as rent she, her mother, her brother Antony, and her little sister Pansy, were to live.

Virginia had had to be the moving spirit in it all. She had elected to settle at Wayhurst, because there is an excellent public school there, and as a day boy, Antony, who was nearly fourteen, might obtain the education of a gentleman.

For nearly two years now such had been the girl's life. Yet even Miriam did not guess the truth—did not guess the drudgery and devotion of Virginia's daily round.

Mr. Rosenberg was what is described as "rolling in money." He had social ambitions, and had been very well pleased when his daughter had made friends at school with the daughter of Bernard Mynors. The Rosenbergs, brother and sister, had more than once accepted the whole-hearted hospitality of Lissendean. Their father could not, therefore, with any good grace, make objections to Miriam's pleading when she begged to have Virginia visit her.

Virginia, by dint of much scrimping and making over, had been able to provide herself with suitable frocks for the visit. She belonged, indeed, to that wonderful type of woman who can make a pound, expended upon clothes, go as far as another woman makes five, or even ten. She had arrived in Bryan-

ston Square with her spirits high and her bloom unimpaired, in spite of the hard life she led. Mr. Rosenberg, when his astute eye had rested upon the charming creature, had become suddenly aware of her as an incarnate temptation to his son Gerald, upon whom all his hopes were concentrated.

As a man of business, he divined her mother to have been the ruin of the family. He knew Mrs. Mynors as a lovely, vain, shallow, and selfish person, who all her life had lived for her own amusement. Such a mother-in-law would be a burden that Gerald could never carry. Moreover, there were two younger children, of whom one, the little girl, was badly crippled—a permanent invalid. Had Virginia, being her father's daughter, stood alone, it is just possible that her extreme beauty would have brought Mr. Rosenberg to the point of allowing the match. With her encumbrances, he felt it to be impossible. During the whole fortnight of Virginia's sojourn he had been on tenterhooks—maneuvering to keep his son out of the way without seeming to do so.

They had—thanks, he felt sure, to his policy—arrived safely at the last day of Miss Mynors' stay. Last moments are, however, fraught with particular danger. Mr. Rosenberg could not feel that he was as yet "out of the wood," and would probably have undergone even worse apprehensions had he known of Gerald's appointment to meet the two girls at the art gallery and go with them to tea.

"I wish Gerald would come," muttered Mims presently. "That man is still tagging after us."

"Let's go and sit at the top of the staircase, in that recess," suggested Virginia. "Then we can see your brother as he comes up. And the man could hardly follow us there without being openly offensive."

"Good!" replied Mims, with satisfaction.

They left the Boucher room, in which the stranger seemed to be absorbed in contemplation, and seated themselves in the alcove behind the statue of "Triumphant Love." A moment later they saw the head of their escort appearing above the edge of the staircase.

Mims stood up and called to him, and in a moment he had joined them.

"Tired of the pictures already?" he asked, glancing at his watch. "I am not late, am I?"

"Oh, no, not a bit! We've only been here a few minutes," replied his sister, noting that the lame man was standing in the doorway, and that his eyes were fixed on Gerald. "Read what is written around the pedestal of this statue, boy," she went on mischievously. "Is it true, or is it not?"

Gerald stooped over the words cut upon the circular base of the figure. He was not actually a handsome man, but he was, without doubt, distinguished looking. His features were clean cut, he was well shaved and well groomed, carried himself with dignity, and was usually self-possessed. He stood before the marble cupid, conscious in every nerve of the close proximity of his sister's beautiful friend, and read aloud the couplet:

*"Qui que tu sois, voici ton maître!  
Il l'est, le fut, ou le doit être."*

"Is it true, Gerald?" asked Mims mischievously.

He looked at Virginia.

"Is it true, Miss Mynors?"

Virginia hesitated.

"Well, I think it is, but not in the sense in which this inscription means it," she ventured timidly. "I mean—there is a love that is stronger than anything or anybody—but not *that* love—not that silly, winged boy."

She blushed a little as she spoke, and looked so divinely pretty, her small



teeth just showing between her parted lips, her shadowy Greuze eyes uplifted, that Gerald felt his head swim.

"I think you're right," he said, speaking with extra gravity to hide his emotion.

"Well, the car is waiting," said Mims. "Shall we be off? You know we dine early. We're going to the theater for Virgie's last night."

The eyes of the man and the girl met, upon that, with mutual regret. Her last night! Cinderella must put off her dainty raiment and return to her saucepan-scouring, bed-making, account-keeping, general-making-ends-meet existence. The pang that shot through Gerald's heart was so like physical pain that he had a fanciful idea that the marble boy—the "Triumphant Love" who looked, smiling, down upon them—had shot his dart and reached the mark. Could he let her go?

Like his father, he was a man of the world. Like his father, he had planned an alliance with birth and money that would establish their position among English gentry. There was a sharp struggle in his mind. Had Virginia had one ounce of the coquette in her, she could have clinched the matter in five minutes.

The lame man, who had watched the whole colloquy, descended the stairs behind them in time to see the perfectly appointed motor in waiting, with its two men in livery. As he turned about and reascended, to enter the galleries once more, there was a bitter sneer on his mouth, a look of active malevolence.

## CHAPTER II.

The three young people, after tea, returned to Bryanston Square in good time to dress for dinner.

As they entered the house, Mr. Rosenberg emerged from his library on the ground floor and called to Gerald, who, thus summoned, hung up his hat

and walked into the dark, cool room where his father was seated at his roll-top desk, with a letter lying before him.

The elder man looked up at his only son with a kindly, half-rueful expression.

"Gerald," he said, "I am not, as a rule, tyrannical, and I think you will admit that I don't pry unduly into your affairs——"

"I do admit it, father."

"So, if I put a question that may seem to you unwarranted, I want you to understand that there is a grave reason for it. The question is this: Is there any understanding between you and Miss Mynors?"

Gerald flushed, a slow, dark flush, as he seated himself near his father, his eyes on the ground.

"No," he said quietly; "not as yet."

"Ha!" The shrewd, kindly eyes above the rims of the reading glasses were fixed upon him. "That means that there might be? Eh, Gerald?"

The younger man did not at once reply. He seemed to be weighing carefully the thing he wished to say. At last——

"I'm not a fool, father," he began, "and I have ambition, or I should be no son of yours. I should prefer to make a marriage that would establish me socially." Embarrassment made his phrasing somewhat stilted. "You will remember that when I first saw Miss Mynors, it was as the daughter of a man with a county position. One assumed the adequate rent roll that went with it——"

"Yes, yes, my boy, I quite understand."

There was a pause.

"She's by far the most beautiful girl I ever saw," said Gerald at length.

"I grant it."

"She has also a beautiful disposition."

"H'mph!"

"Yes, it's so. Her birth being unde-

niable, and her beauty so great, I've been wondering whether—whether anything else that is within my reach could ever be as well worth having—could ever compensate me for her loss—”

“In short, my able, intellectual son is preparing to consider the world well lost for love?”

“I think, father, you will admit the temptation to do so, in this case.”

“I do,” was the answer, in tones abrupt, but heartfelt. “I don't mind owning that during the past fortnight, while seeing whither you were drifting, I've been half inclined to drift also in that direction. But, my boy, it won't do.” He laid his clenched hand heavily on the desk before him. “I tell you plainly that it won't do. The girl is beautiful—I don't deny it. But she comes of a bad stock. Her mother is a woman whom I should describe as having no moral sense. They are beggars! You would have bound upon your back, for the term of your natural life, a ready-made family of three, none of whom, I dare swear, will ever earn a farthing as long as they live. Just run your eye over that.”

With a sudden twisting gesture, he pushed a note, on lavender paper with a narrow black border, and scented with orris root, toward where his son sat. Gerald read:

LABURNUM VILLA, *Wayhurst*.

MY DEAR, GENEROUS FRIEND: With your kindness to my Virginia already placing me under a burden of obligation to you, it must indeed seem to you that I stretch friendship to its utmost in writing to weary you with my troubles and to beseech advice. My excuses are briefly these: I know you to be an excellent man of business—and I know that you love my girl.

I will try not to be tiresome, and, indeed, the story of my misfortunes, though dire, will not take long to tell. My poor husband—who, alas! had not your gift for finance—mortgaged our dear home during his lifetime. At his death, the debts on the estate swallowed up almost all other available money. We were obliged to let Lissendean,

and to live upon the rent paid. I am so unused to business—having lived, till my sad widowhood, so sheltered a life—I forgot that if the payments were not kept up—the interest on the mortgage—I should lose the house altogether. Believe me, in our straitened circumstances it was impossible to keep up the payments. Only yesterday have I heard from my solicitor that the mortgagee has foreclosed, and that we are left as destitute as if my husband had been a crossing sweeper.

Can you suggest to me any means by which this trouble could be met? Is there any way of raising money by which I can stave off the utter ruin that threatens my helpless children? I turn to you as a last resort, and you will never know what it costs my pride to let you into the secret of our misery. Do not tell my darling child until her visit is over. Let her have her happy, happy moments with you undimmed. I can break the bad news to her to-morrow, upon her return—or later, should you by any chance wish her to extend her visit.

I am, dear Mr. Rosenberg, your sorely tried friend,  
VIRGINIA MYNORS.

Once again the dark color deepened upon Gerald's face as he read this letter. He laid it down with a gesture of distaste, and made no audible comment. His father, looking sympathetically at him, tapped the paper with his broad finger tips.

“Gerald,” he said, “that woman is a humbug through and through. It's the letter of a cadger. Look at it—written on paper that cost exactly ten times what her note paper ought to cost. Little things like that tell one a lot. No doubt everything else is on the same scale. I expect they are in debt up to their necks. Now, what can I do with that letter, except send the writer ten pounds, and regret my inability to help her further? Nobody could help her. But I tell you plainly, my son—if I can prevent it, as God's above us, that woman shall never be your mother-in-law.”

He did not speak violently, but judicially, as one summing up a case.

“I went down there once, you may

remember, for a week-end, while they were still at Lissendean," he continued. "I took her measure. She's a woman who would fleece any man who could be got to admire her. She's that type. You think the girl is different. I tell you that what is bred in the bone will come out in the flesh. The girl isn't to be trusted, any more than the mother. You see their position—absolutely destitute! Four of them! What is to happen? Say you marry, say you allow her two or three hundred a year—that's going to cripple you, and it isn't going to keep her." He spoke with ever-increasing urgency. "If you give her three, she'll spend five; if you give her five, she'll spend eight. Can't you see that for yourself, Gerald? It's in that letter, every word of it, if you read between the lines."

"It's a contemptible letter," said Gerald, pushing back his chair abruptly. "But I can't believe that the girl——"

"Gerald, put it to yourself a moment. Even if the girl is the best girl in the world, are you prepared to keep the lot? Virginia's very qualities—her love for her family, her generosity where they are concerned—would be your ruin. You couldn't say no to her—she couldn't say no to them. There you would all be."

Gerald's face hardened. His likeness to his father came out clearly, breaking, as it were, through the polish of his public-school and university training. He saw the case with the Rosenberg eye, and he flinched.

"But how"—he stammered, and cleared his throat—"how am I to draw back with honor, father?"

"I've done that for you. That is, the way out is open, if you will take it. The Liverpool house wrote me this morning, asking to have you sent down for a week. Some bother about that inspector, Routledge—you know the man. I wired to the hotel that you might come up by the night train. It may

fairly be called urgent. My counsel to you is that you just bolt—bolt, and get clear away—before you have committed yourself to a thing that must be hopeless."

Gerald leaned forward, covering his face with his hands. It was a very rare sign of feeling with him.

"You haven't committed yourself—you said you hadn't said or done anything that makes it impossible to draw back?" asked the elder man, in deep anxiety.

"No. That's true. I've said nothing. I'm not even certain what her answer would be. I couldn't say that she had given me any reason to hope. She's so serene, so impartially sweet—one can't tell——"

"Then take your courage in your two hands, boy, and do as I tell you. In a month or two you'll be thanking me on your knees. Bolt, I tell you, bolt. Don't see her again. Leave a message by me; catch the restaurant train. I told Brown to pack your valise, and the car is waiting."

Gerald was pale now.

"She'll think me a cur!"

"No such thing! I shall make good your case. Urgency. She'll think you couldn't help yourself. She'll look upon the affair as hung up, not ended. After a while she'll forget it."

"But—but what are they to do?" stammered Gerald. "The mother may deserve this, but she doesn't. It's she who will have to suffer."

"She shan't suffer. I'll send them enough to carry on, and I'll recommend that wax doll of a mother to take a situation—to go as companion to some heiress, or something—to put her shoulder to the wheel and help to keep her children. She's had a good run for her money—now let her taste the rough side of things for a while. Do her no harm. Do her good."

Gerald rose and went to the window, gazing out with unseeing eyes at the

busy welter of society traffic, the swift cars, laden with well-dressed occupants, that flashed by in the summer evening.

His father watched him anxiously.

"Gerald," he said at last, "listen to me. If you go now—if you do as I tell you—there need be nothing final about it. The girl will be at Wayhurst; you will know where to find her. Suitors are not likely to be as common as blackberries, even with her looks. Take this chance to think things over more coolly than is possible when she is in the same house with you. I don't want to demand too great a sacrifice of you, my boy—"

The last words were husky and wistful. He loved his son sincerely.

Gerald swung around.

"You have me beat, as the Irish say," he muttered abruptly. "I know I'm not master of myself. If I speak to her, it might be against my better judgment—I might regret it. It's better to temporize—to postpone a decision. Yes, it's better, I'm almost sure."

He spoke absently, jerkily. In his mind was one of those pictures that rise unbidden, and apparently without reason, to the memory. It was the picture of the face of a man he had remarked that afternoon at the art gallery, standing in the doorway of the Boucher room as the Rosenberg party had gone downstairs. The man had had a noticeable face, dark, with an expression in the eyes that brought to mind the word "smoldering."

He had watched the gay little party of three with an air like that of Mephistopheles sneering at Faust: "So! You are snared—snared like other men, by a pretty face and luminous eyes!"

That was what the silent watcher had conveyed to the prosperous young suitor.

Oddly, the recollection of that face, swimming all unaware into the field of memory, turned the scale.

"Yes, father, I'll go," said Gerald.

"Why, where's Jerry?" demanded Mims, as she and Virginia entered the drawing-room and proceeded to greet the two young men who stood there. "How do you do, Lawrence? How do you do, Mr. Bent? I expect our box will hold five."

"I telephoned Bent an hour ago, Mims," said Mr. Rosenberg. "Poor old Gerald has had a stroke of bad luck—I've been obliged to send him away."

Mims paused, in consternation, and, as if she could not help it, her glance flew to Virginia.

"To send him away? Why, where?" she cried blankly.

Virginia, more in reply to the glance than as a result of the news, colored divinely. She had put on her very sweetest gown. It was a survival of Lissendean days, carefully altered by the finger of genius so that it looked the very latest fashion. It was pale blue, with touches of faint periwinkle mauve; and young Bent, as he gazed, was trying to decide which color the more nearly matched her eyes.

She was hurt. The news wounded. She had spent this fairy fortnight in luxury and in a dream of happiness. She had not singled out Gerald as anything more than one factor in her bliss. He had been just a part of a perfect scheme of things that must be injured by any interference. So unconscious was she of any deeper significance that she turned at once to Mr. Rosenberg, lifting to him the eyes that even he found a difficulty in resisting, and cried impulsively:

"Do you mean that Gerald is gone? That I shall not see him again before I leave?"

"Why, if you're leaving in the course of the next few days, I fear not," said the hypocrite. "He wasn't pleased, as you may imagine. But business is sometimes urgent, you know. Had he not gone, I must have done so myself; and

he thought a night journey to Liverpool rather too much to expect from a man of my age, who has a son to send, eh?"

"Of course," murmured Virginia. "But it's a pity! It spoils our last evening!"

"Oh, come, now, Miss Virginia! That's a little rough on poor Bent, who has rallied up at a moment's notice to make your party complete. Confess, now—in the lamentable circumstances, could I have done better, eh? I think not! There is dinner announced. Come, take my arm. Mims must divide herself between the two young men."

### CHAPTER III.

There was nobody to meet Virginia Mynors when she stepped out on the station platform at Wayhurst, but obviously she did not expect it. She stood among the throng, in her simple linen suit, and searched with her eyes for the outside porter. It was some time before she could secure his services—he was busy with more important clients—and when at last he had shouldered her trunk and hatbox, it was with the remark that "he couldn't promise to be out at the villas, not much afore nine o'clock that night."

Virginia intimated that nine o'clock would suit, and turned, traveling bag and umbrella case in hand, to brave her hot walk.

It was a sultry evening. The country town was bathed in dust; the roads, though it was almost seven o'clock, seemed shadeless. After a while, the girl stopped to draw her sunshade from its case, and proceeded on her way holding it up with one hand, the weight of her hand luggage in the other.

She looked pale and dispirited. Somehow, the end of her glorious London visit had tailed off in disappointment. The Rosenbergs had been kind, most kind, to the last. They had in-

sisted upon keeping her one day longer, that Mr. Bent might take them to Hendon to see some flying. But longer than that she would not stay, for Pansy, her little lame sister, had written her disquieting news.

"Mama is in an awfull stayt," the letter had run. "I think she has had bad news. She says we are rewend." Which last word Virginia interpreted "ruined."

As she plodded along the High Street, and up the Balchurh Road, past Sycamore Terrace and its handsome houses to the region of tiny villas, these words were haunting Virginia. She had supposed their ruin already accomplished. What could have happened afresh? What had mamma been doing? Incurring debts which she could not pay? This she was constantly doing upon a small scale, in spite of the fact that her daughter rigorously supervised her check book, and herself controlled the household expenditures. Virginia took it for granted that her mother would always spend more than she ought, and was quite used to depriving herself of necessities in order to provide her mother with such small luxuries as expensive soap, note paper, perfume, a library subscription, and so on. Graver expenditure than this she had not anticipated; but she was blaming herself for having yielded to the exploring desire of Mims that she should go to London and her mother's eager advocacy of the plan.

She ought not to have left mamma to the management of anything—she knew it. She was prepared to find the weekly expenses doubled, but she had still a couple of sovereigns in her purse with which she hoped to meet this deficiency. As she moved along in the heat, laden and depressed, her face assumed an aspect of anxiety that altered it surprisingly. Thus seen, it was obvious that she was not merely slender, but sadly thin; hollows were discernible in the



cheeks, shadows lurked around the smiling mouth when it was grave.

At last Laburnum Villa was reached. With a sigh of relief, Virginia trod the tiny garden approach, pushed open the narrow door, and deposited her burdens within the passage.

The passage was extremely small. It was distempered in pale green—Virginia had distempered it—and the paint was white—Virginia had enameled it. The floor was stained—Virginia had stained it—and on it lay a very valuable old Persian corridor rug, relic of Lissendean. From Lissendean, too, came the marble fountainhead that was used for umbrellas, and the little carved-oak table.

Cinderella's expression changed as she entered her home—changed to an eager, glowing delight of anticipation. Light-footed, she ran up the tiny staircase, and, pushing open the door of the back room on the landing, she flew to the side of a child who lay almost flat upon an invalid couch at the open window.

There were ecstatic cries—"Virgie! Virgie!" and "Pansy, my Pansy Blossom!"—and the two sisters were clinging together in a rapture of affection.

"Let's look at you, Virgie, darling! Oh, yes, you are better! It has done you good, hasn't it, dear? Plenty to eat—you know you never have enough at home——"

"Pansy! Pansy! What nonsense you talk, you silly baby! Of course I always have plenty to eat! The point is, how have you been getting on? Has old Mrs. Brown fed you properly? And where is mamma?"

"She's still out, I think. I haven't heard her come in. She went out this afternoon to call upon Major and Mrs. Simpson, and to buy some things to trim up a hat."

"Oh, but she doesn't need another hat," began Virginia, in vexation. "I trimmed her a new one only the day

I left——" She checked herself suddenly.

"Well, somebody sent her some money yesterday, I think," replied Pansy. "She went this morning and bought herself a winter coat at Baxter's sale. She said it was an economy."

"And when winter comes, she'll say it's out of date," replied Virginia, with a little groan. "Oh, dear, I do wish she wouldn't do things like that! With poor Tony's suit almost in rags, and he wanting a bicycle so frightfully!"

"Well, you know it's no use for me to say anything, don't you, dear?" remarked Pansy, with the quaintest assumption of wisdom.

She would have been a pretty child but for her look of transparent, egg-shell frailness. Her hair, with bronze lights in it, clustered charmingly about her small face, and her eyes were as lovely as Virginia's own, but with the haggard, hungry expression of a child who has no health.

She was very small for her age, which was twelve. Her lameness was the result of a bad accident in babyhood. Mr. and Mrs. Mynors had spent a winter on the Riviera, leaving their children in charge of a nurse. Mrs. Mynors had been warned that the nurse was untrustworthy, but had taken no notice of the caution. She had wished to set out on a certain date, and had said she had no time to make other arrangements. The woman had gone out for what is now known as a "joy ride" with the chauffeur and other chosen companions. She had taken with her Pansy, who was the baby, and Bernard, the elder boy, who was her favorite, leaving Tony at home in charge of Virginia. The party had refreshed itself at many taverns on the way, and it was hardly surprising that the affair should have ended in an awful accident. Bernard had been killed, and the baby's spine injured. The shock of his eldest

son's loss was thought to have been the source of Mr. Mynors' own lingering illness.

Nine-year-old Virginia had waited all that terrible day, and part of the night, for the return of the motoring party. Old Brand, the butler, who had been with the Mynors from the time of her father's boyhood, and who had begged his mistress not to leave this nurse in charge of the children, had sat hour after hour with Virginia on his lap, until, at ten o'clock, he had carried her up to bed, had left her in charge of the under nurse, and had himself gone out with one of the gardeners to see if he could hear news of the motor party.

Virginia, though in bed, had not been able to sleep. She had lain listening, listening for a sound in the silent house until the dawn had begun to break. Then she had heard wheels—wheels and voices on the gravel of the drive—and, slipping from her bed without arousing the sleeping nursemaid or Tony, she had run downstairs in her white nightie.

All her life she would remember Brand's face, as he strode into the hall and laid down upon a settle the burden that he carried—Bernard, with his head all shrouded in white linen. Then had come a doctor, stern and tight-lipped, with the moaning baby in his arms. Virginia could recall still the carbolic smell of the doctor's clothes as he had gone upstairs, the blueness of the baby's face in its waxen stillness, and the silence punctuated by faint moans.

The grim realities of life had come then to the girl's consciousness for the first time, never to leave her more. For some years—until she had gone to the school at which she had met Miriam Rosenberg—she had been grave and silent, with a gravity unbecoming her years, her fine health, her promising future. After that she had yielded to the spell of youth and friendship and

adventure, and life had seemed ever sweeter until the final shock of her father's loss.

This hot afternoon, gazing down upon Pansy's pathetic fragility, she thought what sorrows had been hers in the twenty years of her short life. The future looked sadder than usual; her customary good cheer was temporarily absent. She felt a curious depression, a sense of coming trouble.

"You look so grave, Virgie, darling!"

"Pansy, I'm a perfect pig! I believe I'm suffering from that horrible feeling we used to call 'after-the-party' feeling."

"I don't wonder," replied Pansy sagely. "It must be pretty rotten to come back from all that fun and luxury and money to start being maid-of-all-work again. Oh, Virgie, what are we to do?"

"To do? Why, get on, of course—do our work, and enjoy it!" cried Virginia, springing up and going to the window. "Oh, Pansy, the delphiniums! How this hot weather has brought them out! There wasn't one in bloom when I left!"

"I thought you'd be pleased with them!" cried the child, in eager delight. "And look at the roses, too, Virgie—the *Hiawatha*, that you thought was dead!"

"Darling *Hiawatha*! He came from home!" whispered Virginia.

She knelt by the window, her elbows on the sill and her curved chin resting on her hands. The sweet *Greuze* eyes rested on the row of little garden plots, on the farther row that abutted upon them, and on the backs of the houses beyond those. She was young, it was summertime—and yet—and yet—

"Well," said Pansy, "did Gerald send me his love or anything?"

Virginia started. Gerald, at the moment, filled her thoughts. She had missed him when he had gone away—had gone away without a word! She

had not expected to miss him so much. Yet, with the lack of perception of her youth, she failed to connect her present formless dejection with the thought of his departure.

Pulling herself together with a determined effort, she turned from the window and explained to Pansy the fact that Gerald had been obliged to rush off to Liverpool for his father, and thus had naturally not had time for any special message or present.

"But I've got something for you, sweetums," she murmured caressingly. "You wait until the outside porter condescends to deliver my boxes! You only wait!"

Color flooded the cripple's transparent skin.

"Oh, Virgie, Virgie! What is it? Tell me what it is!"

"We'll make it a guessing game," replied Virgie. "I'll just go and get on some old things, and we will play it properly. Where's Tony, by the way?"

"Gone with the eleven to play Balchurh. Did you know they've made him twelfth man? He's awfully bucked," said Pansy, with satisfaction. "I don't expect he'll be back yet."

"Oh, Pansy, but how splendid! He's very young for it, isn't he?"

"Two years younger than the youngest man in the eleven," announced Pansy, with satisfaction. "I'm making him a tie, in the school colors." She took up her knitting with pride.

A sound in the hall below struck Virginia's ear.

"There's mamma," said she. "I must go and see her. Soon be back, darling."

Slipping out of the room, she descended the stairs, and, entering the tiny drawing-room, on the right of the entrance passage, stood face to face with Mrs. Mynors.

It was hard to believe that these were mother and daughter; they looked more like sisters. The elder woman, in co-

quettish slight mourning, had the same face—broad at the brow, tapering at the chin—the same long, lovely eyes, deep-lashed, the same poise of the head, and wavy, golden-brown hair. A close observer alone would have marked the difference. The elder woman's eyes were blue, like forget-me-nots—the hard blue that looks so soft, that never varies. Her daughter's were less easy to describe. They were changeful as the sea, responsive to varying skies; and just now, in the waning light, they seemed dark gray.

"Well, my chick, how are you? I was having tea with the Simpsons, and forgot the time, or I should have been back before this. You're looking better for your change. I'm glad I persuaded you to go, though we got on pretty badly without you."

Passing her keen eyes over her daughter's face, she seated herself, slightly drawing up her skirt with a motion which intimated that she expected to have her shoes untied.

Unhesitatingly, Virginia knelt upon the ground and performed this service. The little room in which they were was a bower of luxury. In it were collected all the relics of their vanished past that Mrs. Mynors had thought herself unable to do without—silver, miniatures, cushions, footstools, a soft couch, an Empire writing table. It was like the boudoir of a rich woman. Its owner cast a disgusted glance about her as she remarked:

"Charwomen never will dust, will they?"

"Oh, I hoped you would have dusted this room yourself, just while I was away," replied Virginia, with a sigh, casting her housewifely eye upon the tarnished silver. It was a room that took a good hour a day to keep in proper order.

"Well, Virgie, have you any news for me?" asked Mrs. Mynors presently, in her voice of tantalizing sweetness.

Virginia raised her eyes, puzzled by something in the voice.

"News? Nothing very special," she answered wonderingly. "I told you most of it in my letters. The flying, yesterday, was most interesting—quite worth staying for."

Mrs. Mynors sat meditatively while her daughter left the room, went upstairs, found indoor shoes, and brought them down. She then carefully pulled the pins from the becoming hat and removed it, her mother sitting in calm acquiescence the while. Mrs. Mynors was uneasy. Her reading between the lines in Virginia's innocent letters had certainly led her to conclude that Gerald Rosenberg meant to marry the girl. Had she herself made a fatal mistake in sending that letter to Gerald's father before the matter had been clinched? She had felt doubts, but her dire need had driven her on. Now she was wondering how to find words in which to convey to Virginia the blow that had descended.

Virginia always divided the money. Each quarter she had apportioned to her mother the sum for the interest on the mortgage. But there had always been something else on which that money must be spent.

What would Virgie say when she knew that Lissendean had gone—vanished—that they would never revisit it—that Tony could never come into his inheritance? Far though she was from any feeling of self-blame, she yet was conscious of discomfort as she looked at her daughter's unsuspecting face.

It was easy to decide not to spoil Virgie's first evening at home by bad news. Leaving her daughter to carry her hat, gloves, and sunshade to the room above, she settled herself luxuriously by the open window, with her feet up, and plunged into temporary forgetfulness in the pages of a very exciting novel.

Meanwhile, the outside porter prov-

ing better than his word, the trunk arrived and was unpacked. The enraptured Pansy found herself mistress of a doll of almost inconceivable beauty, with jointed limbs and a body that could be washed in real water. Mims had added a chest of drawers and various articles of clothing. The dressing and undressing of dolls had always been the little cripple's one joy. Never, however, had she hoped to possess such a doll as this.

Then Tony came home, hot and exultant, looking such a fine boy in his flannels and school blazer. Our team had licked the other chaps, after a hard fight, during which, of course, the umpire had given a verdict grossly unfair and in favor of the rival eleven.

He received his own present very graciously; a curious collection of oddments it seemed to the uninitiated, but he had marked what he wanted in a catalogue, and his sister had obediently bought as directed. Contrite wheels, eccentrics, female screws, and so on, were darkness to her mind, but pure joy to the recipient.

In the delight of these two, in the narration of Tony's successes, the simple heart of the elder sister plunged itself, and found comfort. Her gift to her mother, a pair of really nice gloves, was also accepted graciously, though with an absence of enthusiasm that led Virginia to suspect that other things besides the winter coat had been purchased that morning at Baxter's sale. Who could have sent money to her mother? She could think of nobody, for the men friends who had hovered continually about Lissendean had never penetrated to Laburnum Villa. Mamma, however, made no confidences, and could not, of course, be questioned.

It came to be time for Mrs. Brown to depart, and mamma had no silver, and asked Virgie to pay her off. The young housekeeper then felt at liberty to go and survey her kitchen premises,

and to heave deep sighs at the sight of so many dirty pots and pans and the inevitable brown patch burned upon the enamel of her favorite saucepan.

#### CHAPTER IV.

Nobody who saw Virginia next morning, in her long blue linen apron, bringing up her mother's early-morning tea, would have recognized the dainty flower of luxury who had moved over the polished floors of the art gallery.

She put the tray beside the bed, drew back the curtains, and brought in the hot water, just as a housemaid might have done. Mrs. Mynors, rosy and beautiful among her pillows, rubbed her sleepy eyes and murmured, "Thank you, dear one," in a perfunctory manner, stretching her white arms luxuriously, and adding fretfully, "Another grilling day!"

Virginia made no answer to this comment, but withdrew to the kitchen, where Tony sat munching his fried bread and bacon and drinking his coffee with a schoolboy's appetite.

When he had been dispatched, clean, and ready for his day's work, there was Pansy's breakfast to be thought of. Dainty toast, fresh tea, a spoonful of jam, were arranged on a pretty tray and carried upstairs. Then Virginia was at leisure to sit down for a few minutes, drink what was left of the coffee in Tony's pot, and eat some bread and butter. In truth, she had little appetite. The heat sapped her strength, and she reflected sadly that it was a mistake to go away. A holiday made it harder to begin again.

From the moment of finishing her breakfast till the moment of laying lunch, she never ceased from her labors. The kitchen must be thoroughly scrubbed before its dainty mistress could be friends with it again. Then there were beds to make, a room to sweep, three rooms to dust. Then her

mother came down, drank a cup of beef tea, and settled herself in the garden with some embroidery, while Virginia went up to make her bed and do her room.

When lunch had been cleared and washed up, she had an hour's breathing space. She spent it lying upon the bed in Pansy's room, the little cripple having been moved, as usual, to her invalid couch by the window.

Virginia was so tired that she herself felt alarmed. What was to become of them all if her health were to give way? The thought was too horrible to be dwelt upon.

Her mother, remarking the depression of her spirits, was vexed. She could not help wishing that Virginia were not quite such a simpleton. If she had had an ounce of the coquette in her, she could have secured Gerald Rosenberg, and all would have been well. Mrs. Mynors had refrained from any kind of hint when the girl had gone to London in response to Miriam's urgent invitation. She had thought that a hint might defeat itself. Now she was wondering whether, in view of her daughter's obtuseness, she would not have done well to let her know what was expected of her. She could see that the girl was out of heart, and she shrank, partly from cowardice, partly from affection, from dealing the final blow.

Yes—her utter selfishness notwithstanding, Mrs. Mynors had some affection for Virginia. She misunderstood the girl, and undervalued her—she accepted all her daughter's burnt offerings and sacrifices as manifestly her own due; yet she trusted and leaned upon her with all the weight of her own empty egotism.

Next morning, when the little figure in the long blue apron brought in tea, there was a businesslike letter lying upon the tray. Mrs. Mynors did not open it until she had enjoyed her tea,



for it was from the solicitors who had foreclosed the mortgage, and well she knew that it was not likely to contain anything that would please her.

She lay for some time, after she had eaten and drunk, glancing at the morning paper and trying to bring herself to face the necessary unpleasantness. At last, heaving a sigh of boundless self-pity, she took the envelope in her pretty white hands and opened it.

As she read, a sudden flush mounted to her very brow. A smothered exclamation broke from her. She was seized with trembling, her heart beat suffocatingly, and, with a bound, she sprang from bed, rushed to her mirror, and stood there, surveying with sparkling eyes the image of Virginia Mynors at the age of forty-one.

Oh, did the mirror lie, or was it true that she was very nearly as pretty as ever? Hardly a silver thread in the beautiful ripe-gold hair that had no slightest hint of red in it. The teeth still perfect within the pretty lips. Barely discernible crows' feet at the corners of the brilliant, expressive eyes. Plumper she was, no doubt, but to be plump prevents wrinkles. As she stood there, even in her disarray, she knew that she did not deceive herself. She was still a most attractive woman.

And fate had sent her a chance like this! With pulses racing, she crept back to her bed and curled up there, trying to decide how best to take advantage of this marvelous coincidence, this strange turn of fortune's wheel.

What a good thing that she was a woman of experience, no longer a shy girl! She must not lose this chance, as silly Virginia had lost hers! No, no! She was too clever for that.

How well the French wit had said, "*Si la jeunesse savait! Si la vieillesse pouvait!*"

In herself, the two states of youth and age were met felicitously. She was old enough to know, young enough to

enjoy. If she could not now take hold on circumstance and wrest her defeat into pure victory, then she was no better than a fool—and she had never thought herself that.

All the time she was dressing, her lips would part in a smile that revealed those pretty teeth and a dimple that still lurked in a fold of her smooth cheek. Thrills of anticipation coursed most agreeably through her being. How had she been able to bear it so long—this crushing, stifling existence in an odious little box in a horrid, third-rate town? How patient she had been, what a martyrdom she had borne! For the children it was, of course, different. For her, it had been a living burial. Now that it was over—now that she saw a shining gateway admitting her back to the world she loved so well—it seemed incredible that she should have stood it so long.

What would Virgie say now—Virgie, who was always so mean and stingy, reproving her for gratifying even the simplest taste, expecting her to live as if she had been brought up in one of the cottages on her husband's estate? She pictured the rapture of gratitude and devotion with which the girl would realize that her mother's charm, her mother's ability to hold a man's affection for twenty years and more, was to mend the family fortunes. She faced, only to disregard it, the fact that Virginia would have some ridiculous scruples about her father's memory. She was very sure that, for Pansy's and Tony's sake, if not for her own, Virginia would welcome any way out.

There was a tap at her door, and her daughter entered, soft-footed, carrying a cup on a tray.

"I've brought you cold beef-tea jelly, dearest, as it is such a hot day," said she, putting it down. "Would you like me to do your hair for you?"

"Oh, my chick, if you only would! I feel quite overstrained! I've had

such extraordinary—such heart-searching news! I very nearly fainted when I was having my bath."

Virginia turned pale. The remembrance of Pansy's revelation concerning their "rewend" condition leaped to her mind. Something had stolen her buoyancy. She felt an inward flinching, as if she could not bear a fresh blow. It must be the heat. She took up a silver brush, and said, as stoutly as she could:

"Well, mums, tell me all about it. I can bear it."

Mrs. Mynors pushed aside her golden tresses, opened a small drawer, searched it, and drew out the solicitor's letter.

"Virgie, I could not tell you the very day you came home," she faltered. "It would have been brutal. But I suppose you must know."

Her daughter, taking the legal-looking document in her suddenly cold hands, sank, rather than seated herself, upon a chair, for the humiliating reason that she felt unable to stand.

There was silence for a while in the tiny room, which, like the drawing-room downstairs, was a bower of luxury. Carpet, curtains, furniture, all were costly relics of bygone days—something to make a pillow between the dainty head of its mistress and the hard, cold boards of poverty. Even as she had cleaned the silver toilet articles yesterday, Virgie had noted a fresh bottle of a particularly expensive perfume affected by her mother.

Now she read the letter—read the family doom.

All gone! Everything! Lissendean!

She put her hands to her head. She must think. What was left?

Nothing! They were paupers. Tony must leave school and become an errand boy. She, Virginia, must go into service. Pansy must be got into a home for cripples. Her mother?

And she had gone without the necessities of life to keep up those payments,

while Mrs. Mynors had been squandering the money on petty luxuries!

For a moment passion surged up so strongly in Virginia that she had to clench her hands and grind her teeth, while she shook with the effort to refrain from telling the pretty, golden-haired doll once for all what she thought of her—this mother whom she had so loved, whom dad had so loved! Almost his last words had been a plea to his daughter not to let her mother suffer if she could help it.

Had she not done her best? What more could have been required of her? She had sacrificed her whole life to the service of her loved ones—had drudged and toiled that her mother might have ease, had listened to her grumbling complaints, had humored her willfulness. All had been in vain! In vain! To her mother's consternation, and even annoyance, Virginia slipped off her chair in a dead faint.

With a sense of acute injury that her plump, useless hands should be called upon to render such service, Mrs. Mynors succeeded in lowering the girl to the floor. Then, still resentful, she actually got a wet sponge and laid it on her daughter's forehead. This not succeeding, she found eau de Cologne, and applied that. After a time, Virginia slowly returned to life and to a knowledge of the enormity of her behavior. She dragged herself to her mother's bed and lay down there until her swimming senses should readjust themselves.

They were ruined! And her mother was buying winter coats and bottles of perfume! It was almost laughable.

"You cannot reproach me, really, Virgie," said her mother presently, speaking with sad submissiveness from out of her cloud of hair. "You must see that I couldn't help spending that money, and also that I never dreamed what would be the result of getting behindhand with my payments. Our own

lawyer ought to have warned me. I consider him much to blame in the matter."

Virginia had nothing at all to say.

"I can see that you do blame me," Mrs. Mynors cried. "You lie there without a word of comfort—as if I had ruined you, and not myself, too! I suppose it's as hard for me as for you."

Virgie turned her face over and hid it on the pillow.

After gazing at her for some time, in a mood that accusing conscience made bitter, Mrs. Mynors decided to play her trump card.

"You needn't put on all these airs of tragic despair, Virgie. I've told you the bad news first. This morning I've had other news—the most extraordinary thing—the most unlikely coincidence—that you ever heard! Do you want me to tell you about it, or are you too ill to pay any attention?"

Virgie made an effort, and sat up.

"I'm so sorry, mother. It was very sudden, you know, and it's all so horrible—like falling over a precipice. I felt as if I couldn't grasp it. I'm better now."

She slipped off the bed and tottered to the window, leaning out into the air.

"Please tell me—everything," she begged.

Mrs. Mynors leaned forward, and a little mischievous smile showed her dimple, as she said, playing nervously with the articles in her manicure set:

"Did you ever hear me speak of the man I was once engaged to—the man I jilted to marry your father—Mr. Gaunt?"

"I believe I have," replied Virginia, knitting her brows.

"It was a tiresome affair," went on the lady, with a sigh. "He was very young and impetuous— That's perhaps putting it too mildly—he had a shocking temper, and he didn't take his jilting at all peaceably. I know I was in

fault—but what is a girl to do? He was a mere boy. When I promised to marry him, I had never seen your father—and you know, Virgie, darling, how irresistible he was."

"Yes, I know," said Virginia, telling herself that, after all, her mother must have loved the dead man better than had appeared.

The dainty lips curved into a yet broader smile.

"Poor Gaunt! It seems that he has never married," went on the musical voice. "He was too madly in love, I suppose, for any transfer of his affections to be possible. But the point of it all is this: I have this morning heard that it is he who holds the mortgage on our property. Lissendean belongs to him!"

Virginia's big, sad eyes opened very wide.

"I heard this morning from the lawyers that he's in London for a week or two, and wants to get the business finished off. I've made my little plan. I mean to go up to town and see him, Virgie."

The words brought Virginia to her feet.

"To go and see him?"

"Yes. I must, for my children's sake, make an appeal to his kindness of heart. The pain I caused him must long ago have been forgotten, and if I can only procure an interview with him, I feel very little doubt of being able to persuade him to allow us more time."

Virginia considered.

"Do you think he'll see you? It might be very painful for him. Have you heard nothing of him since your marriage?"

"Nothing. He lives in the country now, it seems. He must have inherited the place that belonged to his old great-aunts. He always used to tell me that there was not much chance of his coming into it. He was a fine fellow, in his way, only difficult—so jealous, for

one thing. However, it would be most interesting to meet him. I wonder," co-quettishly, "if he will know me again? I don't fancy that I have changed much."

"Very little, I should think," said Virgie. "The miniature that father had done of you the first year you were married is still just like you."

Mrs. Mynors smiled brightly. She was beginning to recover her good humor.

"Unless he has altered strangely, he will not be cruel to the widow and the fatherless," she murmured pensively. "Cheer up, Virgie. All is not yet lost. Try to be a little hopeful, dear child."

Virginia sat twisting her hands together, turning the matter over in her mind. Her mother's creditor was her mother's old lover. Her mother was going to seize this fact and make the most of it. Something in Virginia revolted at the idea, but she could not urge her objections. She fixed her purple-gray eyes upon the gay face in the mirror. It might have been that of a woman without a care. Every instinct in her mother was kindled at the idea of once more encountering, and most probably conquering, what had been hers once and would turn to her again.

A stepfather! That was an idea to make one wince. With all the ingrained fidelity of her simple nature, the girl hated the thought.

Yet, after all, what was the alternative?

She felt that the family fortunes had passed beyond her power to adjust or alter. As long as a foothold of dry ground remained, she had, as it were, protected those dear ones from the raging flood. Now that the tide had swept them away, and they were all tossing on the waters, could she object to her mother's seizing a rope—any rope—that might be flung to them?

"I suppose he knows," she said, after a long pause, "he knows that it is you?"

"I suppose so. These coincidences are very curious. I've never seen him—never even heard from him—since our rupture." She reflected, her chin on her hand. "Strange that he should have inherited money," she observed. "He wasn't at all well off when I knew him, though he was very ambitious. He wrote—essays, and so on—for the press. He was certainly clever. Twenty-two years since I saw him last! How strange it seems! I used to be afraid, at first, that he might try to kill me or your father—he was so violent. At our wedding we had special police arrangements, but nothing happened—nothing at all." She spoke as if the fact were slightly disappointing.

"It's a chance," sighed Virginia. "If you can bear it, mother—if it's not asking too much of you to go and beg a favor from a man you once wounded—then I think you'd better try."

Mrs. Mynors' mouth drooped at the corners, and her face took on the sweetest look of resignation.

"Virgie, dearest, you can fancy—you can understand something of what it will cost me. But for my children's sakes I must put my own feelings aside. I must go and see what I can do. Let me see. Where—how—could I meet him? A solicitor's office does not lend itself— Oh, Virgie, I have it! What a comfort, what a piece of good luck, that I became a life member of the Sportswoman three years ago! I'll ask him to meet me there. I'll write a note to be given to him direct—and I don't think he'll refuse. If he does, I'll just go to London and take him by storm. I vow I'll see him somehow! Leave it to me, Virgie. You shall see what I can do. When my children's bread is at stake, no effort shall be too great, no sacrifice too difficult."

Later on, when Virginia had done her hair to perfection and gone away to her neglected work, Mrs. Mynors took a chair, mounted it, and unlocked

a small drawer at the top of her tallboy. There were several bundles of letters and papers in the drawer, and a small jewel case containing a ring. She searched among the papers for one loose envelope, addressed in a forcible, small, but not cramped handwriting.

She sat down, with this letter and the ring box upon her knee. The letter ran:

You make a mistake. It is not the transfer of your affections from myself to Mynors of which I complain, for this has not taken place. What has happened is simply that you have bartered yourself for his money and position. If I had been cursed with a few hundreds a year more than he has, you would not have forsaken me.

You never loved me; but for a whole year you have succeeded in deceiving me—in making me believe that you did. This is the thing I find unpardonable. Men have killed women for such treachery as yours. Were I to kill you, it would save poor Mynors a good many years of misery. But the code of civilized morals forbids so satisfactory a solution. You must live, and destroy his illusions, one by one.

I ought to thank you for my freedom, but that I cannot do, being human. As a man in worse plight than mine once said: "My love hath wrought into my life so far that my doom is; I love thee still." There lies the humiliation and the sting.

The woman's lips curved into a smile of foreseen triumph. The insult in the first part of the letter was nothing to her. There was his written confession; in spite of her betrayal, he loved her still. After the lapse of all these years the lava torrent of his boyish fury had no doubt cooled. The love might well remain.

## CHAPTER V.

A week later, Mrs. Mynors stood before her mirror at a much earlier hour than was her wont. She was arranging her veil with a hand that shook and eyes full of a curious mixture of anxiety and triumph; anxiety because she was bound upon an errand of enormous strategic importance, triumph, because

her imagination ran on ahead and pictured things that she would have blushed to own.

Her old lover had assented to her proposal for a meeting. He was to be this morning, at twelve o'clock, at the Sportswoman—that smartest and most go-ahead of county ladies' clubs in London.

Virginia stood near. She held in her hand a dainty hand bag embroidered with steel beads and lined with pale violet. Into this she was putting a purse, a powder puff, a wisp of old lace that was supposed to be a handkerchief, and so on. The aroma of the expensive perfume was over everything.

Mrs. Mynors' costume was a subtle scheme of faint half mourning. It was most becoming.

"What time do you think you'll be back?" asked Virginia.

"My child, how can I say? You must expect me when you see me. It depends so much upon what I accomplish. If Osbert Gaunt proves disagreeable, I must just get a bit of lunch at the club and come straight home. If he's hospitably inclined—why, you see, it might be later."

"I only wanted to know how much money you're likely to spend."

"Don't trouble about that, dear one. I have plenty of money for my modest needs."

She stepped back, surveyed the general effect of her appearance, and sighed a little. Then, opening one of the small jewel drawers in her toilet table, she took out a ring case, and slipped the ring it contained upon her finger. It was a large tourmalin, set in small brilliants—a lovely blue, like the eyes of its wearer.

"What a pretty ring! I never saw it before!" said Virginia, with interest. She loved pretty things. That trait she had inherited from her mother.

"His engagement ring," said the widow pensively. "He wouldn't take



it back. He said it would bring a curse upon any woman who wore it. He shall see that I have kept it."

Virginia's heart surged up within her until she almost broke into weeping. Her own mother—the widow of Bernard Mynors—the widow of the most beloved, the dearest, the best, the handsomest— She was setting out gayly to fascinate an old lover—wearing on her finger the ring he had bestowed in the days when she had never seen her husband.

"How can she?" thought Virgie to herself.

Her mother was a continual puzzle to her. In her intense simplicity, she took her, usually, at her own valuation. She believed devoutly that it was at great personal cost that Mrs. Mynors was going to town that day; she judged her mother's feelings by her own. And yet—and yet—

The sound of wheels on the road outside caused her to look from the window.

"Why, here's an empty fly stopping at the door," said she, in a tone of surprise.

"I ordered it, Virgie," replied her mother, a little embarrassed. "I have so little strength, especially of a morning, I felt that on an errand like this I should want all my force, all my coolness. This heat is so unnerving." She smiled deprecatingly. "My poor little fly is the sprat to catch a whale," she laughed. Then, impetuously, she flung her arms about her daughter's neck. "Wish me luck! Oh, wish me luck!" she cried.

Virginia's warm heart leaped at the cry. She embraced her mother with all the fervor she dared employ for fear of crushing the delicate dress.

They went downstairs together. Mrs. Mynors stepped into the shabby fly with a look of disdainful fortitude, her sunshade was given her, and, with a wave

of her hand to the girl at the gate, she started off upon her great mission.

Virgie went slowly into the kitchen, sat down wearily, and poured out her tepid tea. After eating and drinking a few mouthfuls listlessly, she roused herself to prepare fresh tea for Pansy and to carry her breakfast upstairs.

"Good morning, precious! How have you slept?" she cried cheerily, as she set down the tray, drew up the blind, and went to the bedside.

Pansy lay there smiling, perfectly flat on her back, with Ermentrude, the new doll, at her side.

"Slept booful. Not one pain all night. But I'm fearfully hungry, Virgie!"

"I don't wonder. I'm dreadfully late! I had to get mother off, you see. She's just started," replied Virginia, trying to keep the sorrow out of her trembling voice. She stooped, touched a handle below the bed, and, with incredible care and delicacy, wound the little cripple up into a posture just enough tilted to enable her to feed herself.

"Gone to see a gentleman she used to know before she knew dad," remarked Pansy, pondering. "He'll think she's every bit as pretty as she was then, don't you think so?"

"Yes, I'm sure he must think so."

"Oh, Virgie!" after a long pause. "Suppose he were to ask her again?"

Her sister winced as this dark idea was thus frankly expressed in words. She had, however, been more or less prepared for it.

"I don't think it very likely, Pansy," she replied slowly. "But if he did, and if mother thought it was her duty to say yes, we mustn't make it hard for her."

"How could it be her duty to say yes?" demanded Pansy argumentatively. "She loved dad, and it would be beastly to have a stepfather."

"It would be beastlier still not to have enough to eat," was the thought

in Virgie's heart. She did not express it, however. The child knew nothing of the terrible state of things, and must not know unless it was inevitable.

"We'll hope for the best, darling. He may not ask her," she said softly. "And now eat your breakfast while I go and clear away downstairs."

From Euston, one must positively take a taxi in order to arrive at Dover Street. Mrs. Mynors instructed the driver to throw back the hood, and reclined, her sunshade between her delicate face and the June sun, enjoying a few minutes of the kind of pleasure in which she reveled.

Ah, the joy of it! The gay streets, the well-dressed crowds, the enticing shops, the loaded flower baskets at the street corners, the window boxes in the tall houses, the flashing cars, the bustle and movement of London in the season! Here, she felt, was her native element. To this she belonged—she whom a cruel fate had treated so ill as to cause the whole structure of her pleasure to crumble to nothing at the very time of life when a woman begins to feel that she needs comforts and luxury.

For forty years she had enjoyed that empire which any beautiful woman may enjoy if she chooses. Her beauty had prevented every one who came near her from realizing the truth about her. Had you told her that she was a monster of selfishness, that never had she loved anybody but herself, that she had jilted a poor man to marry a rich one, and that she had loved neither the one nor the other, she would simply have wondered how your mind could have become so warped as to cause you to utter such slanders.

Now that she had the twofold weapons of beauty and misfortune, surely none could resist.

Not for long years had her heart so throbbed, her blood run so swiftly, as

this morning, as her taxi turned out of Bond Street, slid along Grafton Street into Dover Street, and stopped at the doors of the club. Since her husband's death she had never entered it. Now she wondered how she had kept away so long, and admired with fervor her own Spartan heroism. How meekly she had bowed under undeserved adversity!

She strolled into the ladies' dressing room, put down her sunshade, and contemplated herself in a mirror. The things she had seen in the shops that morning—the costumes in the streets—had put her somewhat out of conceit with her own appearance. The mirror, however, restored all her self-confidence. She was looking lovely, with a bloom in her cheeks that the fagged-out London women who were chatting languidly near her could not hope to emulate.

She used her powder with judgment and restraint, adjusted her veil, and went out into the hall.

"I'm going into the chintz parlor," she said to the page boy, "and I'm expecting a gentleman by appointment. Bring him to me there—Mrs. Mynors."

"Member, ma'am?" said the boy doubtfully.

She smiled sweetly.

"Yes; but I've been away for two years. Look up the name, if you are in doubt. You'll find me among the life members."

She went upstairs, outwardly quite tranquil, though inwardly she was shaken with a storm of excitement which she could not wholly understand.

In the old days, she had feared Osbert Gaunt. She remembered that, Devoted slave as he had been, she had thought she did not own it to herself. Had, perhaps, some faint, instinctive premonition that he was in reality her master. He had been subject to bursts of passion—to fits of sullen rage. It

had been exciting, but exhausting, to be loved by him.

All that had been twenty years ago. What was he now?

She surveyed the pretty little parlor, furnished in a clever imitation of the Georgian era. From among the chairs she selected two. Then, changing her mind, she chose a small couch, with room for two to sit upon it. She brought forward a little table, put some magazines upon it, opened one, and became so absorbed in the sketch of a Paris gown which it contained that she started annoyingly at the voice of the page boy crying sonorously, "A gentleman for Mrs. Mynors!"

Osbert Gaunt walked in. Her first thought was that she would have known him anywhere. Certainly, his was a personality not easy to forget. He was dark skinned by nature, and, as he lived in the open air, he was also much tanned. His black hair was slightly softened with gray at the temples, but his mustache was raven black, and it altered his appearance to something utterly unlike her memory of the keen, young, boyish face.

He walked with the limp that she remembered well, and as they shook hands, his glance swept over her from head to foot, appraising and, as it seemed, condemning, for his lip curled in a sneer. He was perfectly self-possessed, while the lady was genuinely agitated.

"I trust that I am punctual to your appointment, madam?" he said dryly.

They were alone in the room. She noticed that with thankfulness, even while she realized how entirely the man had the advantage over her. To her, this interview meant everything; to him, apparently, very little.

She was so much affected that she sat down at once, making a little appealing movement with her hand that he should sit beside her, as she murmured:

"Oh, Osbert, you are good to come! And you're so little changed!"

He replied with an indifference that amounted to discourtesy:

"I came to suit my own convenience. And I have changed completely."

With this preliminary amenity, he looked around, chose a chair, brought it forward, and sat down facing her. His rudeness was so disconcerting that she forgot her part, and spoke confusedly:

"Oh, no, indeed, you have not changed—you always used to contradict! That was part of your temperament."

"Pardon me. I am not here to discuss my temperament," was the instant retort. "I've come on business."

She made a little deprecating sound, as if he had hurt her.

"Oh, Osbert, this is dreadful! Dreadful! If I had expected this, I wouldn't have appealed to you! How could I dream that you would have remained unforgiving all these years?"

She drew out the tiny handkerchief, redolent of lily of the valley. In the old days a tear from her had driven him mad.

"You surprise me," was his answer. "I understood that you desired to discuss a mortgage. If you will allow me to say so, I must confess that any allusion from you to our past relations seems to me to be in the worst of taste."

"Osbert! Oh, Osbert! That you can speak so to me! It's useless—quite useless—to go farther! Had I been rich and prosperous, I could understand your desire to taunt me! I never could have believed that you would stoop to it when you know quite well the straits to which we are reduced—that I and mine are starving!"

Again his look swept over her, as if mocking at her general aspect of subdued luxury.

"Madam, it seems to me that the un-

fortunate tradesmen whom you employ are more likely to starve than you are," he said emphatically. "But, as regards your financial position, that is, I suppose, part of the subject that we are here to discuss. I gather that my foreclosing of this mortgage embarrasses you seriously?"

She kept her face turned from him, allowing one crystal tear to lie undried upon her soft cheek, as she answered, in low, grief-broken tones:

"We were almost beggars before. This is the final straw."

He took the chance she gave him to look full at her. Her aspect of humiliation and discouragement seemed to please him.

"Good!" said he. "Then we come to something definite. What do you suggest that I should do in this matter? I'm a little puzzled, because you can't, I think, have supposed that I would be likely to strain any point in your favor—rather, perhaps, the reverse, eh?"

She paused, as it were, for breath. What could she do? She had thought of him in many ways, but had foreseen nothing like this. Even her impervious vanity was forced to the conclusion that the sight of her, in her scarcely impaired beauty, moved him no more than if she had been a hairdresser's block. Not even the ashes of passion remained. He was pleased that she should be humiliated; he liked to have her at his feet! Oh, why had she not guessed that a nature like his—warped, distorted, embittered—would but rejoice at seeing the woman who had injured him brought low? His foot was on her neck! She felt inclined to spring up and rush from the room—or to snatch his hands and make some wild appeal. Why, this was the man who had trembled at her touch—who had thrashed the son of a peer for saying that she was a flirt! This was the man who had been made happy with a smile, desperate with a frown. Yet now—

In fierce longing to bring him once more into subjection, she stifled her resentment, she resisted her impulse to give way. As his insulting words stung her, she winced, like one enduring an unworthy blow.

"I made a mistake," she said, in a low voice. "I must own it. I actually did, as you suggest, hope that you would strain a point in my favor. All that I remember of you is noble. I fancied that the fact—which I admit—that I once injured you, so far from being against me, would constrain you the more to serve me, if you could."

"Indeed! So that was what you thought? It was rather clever of you, but not quite clever enough. I have to own that I don't at all consider that your having successfully hoodwinked me twenty years ago gives you a right to do it again. But let that pass! It's the mortgage that we must keep in mind. I think it not impossible that we may come to terms—that I may be able to afford you some relief—on conditions"—he held up his hand hastily as she turned impulsively on her seat—"on conditions, I say. You had better wait to hear me."

For the first time she let her eyes meet his. The cruelty, the ironic sense of mastery, conveyed to her from beneath those half-shut lids made her shudder involuntarily. So might an inquisitor have surveyed the victim brought, bound, into his presence. Still, she kept up the pose—the only one that occurred to her scared wits—of relying upon his nobility.

"I knew—I knew you could not mean to be merciless," she faltered.

"Don't go too fast," he replied coldly. "There is much to consider before thanks can appropriately be offered. In the first place, a few questions are necessary. To begin: Have you a daughter, with a quite remarkable resemblance to yourself, and was she in London a week or two ago, with some

friends who have a motor car—a young man and a young woman?"

Mrs. Mynors sat a moment speechless, considering this new turn of the incredible conversation.

"Yes," she faltered at last, "that is quite true. Virginia was in town, with our friends the Rosenbergs."

His lip curled.

"*Virginia!* You named her after yourself!"

"It was my husband's wish," she stammered. "She's the dearest, the best girl in the world——"

"Madam," with mock reverence, "that is an unnecessary statement—she is your daughter—and she is a replica of you. I saw her in a picture gallery, not long ago. Interested by the astonishing likeness, I took pains to overhear some of her conversation. The second Virginia is, I am convinced, worthy of the first—which is saying a great deal. You are attached to her, madam?"

"Attached to her? Attached to my darling daughter? Are you mad, Osbert?"

"I don't think so. I'm still a bachelor, you know, and the proposal that I put before you is this: If your daughter will accept the position that her mother declined, we will cry quits, you and I."

She almost screamed in the extremity of her surprise and mortification. Had he struck her with a horsewhip, she could not have felt more outraged. Fury, resentment, a wild, combative resistance that she could not recognize as jealousy, deprived her for a while of speech. She was choking, inarticulate, with the force of blind feeling that shook her as a tempest shakes a tree.

"You are atrocious!" she ejaculated at last. "Simply atrocious! What can you mean? Virgie won't have you!"

"In that case, there will be no need of further discussion," was his answer. "In your place, I think I should urge

her to accept the offer. If she does accept it, I will make you an allowance of three hundred pounds a year for life, besides undertaking the expense of your son's education. Are there other children?"

She was staring at him as one may gaze, fascinated, upon a cobra about to strike.

"One other," she replied hurriedly, "a little girl. *She is lame.*"

"Ha!" A dull flush rose to his face. "Cripples seem to haunt your footsteps. Well—in the event of your accepting my offer, it shall be my care to see that she has the proper treatment and the best advice."

"Good gracious me," slowly said the bewildered woman, "am I dreaming? Osbert, you *must* be mad!"

"Madam, I think you will find that I'm considered remarkably sane by most people. Anyway, you have my offer—make what you can of it. I'll put it in writing, if you like. Your daughter won't find many husbands who would be willing to marry and provide for the entire family. Yet you see—such is my devotion that I'm ready to do even this for her charming sake."

"Devotion? You have no devotion!" she cried wildly. "You're taking advantage of my helplessness to torture me! You'd torture Virginia! How can you feel any devotion for a girl you have only set eyes upon once?"

"Well, we will say it is not devotion that inspires me, but a desire to get a bit of my own back," said he, with a most unpleasant smile. "She will be the Andromeda, sacrificed for the rest of you—offered to the beast—myself. You flinched from such a fate; if she now undertakes to brave it, won't that be poetic justice?"

Mrs. Mynors swallowed once or twice, blinked, tried to visualize the impression this speech gave. Since his entrance, nothing that Gaunt had said had sounded real. There had been a



sarcasm, a jeering cadence—he had been playing with her all the time. But these words had a different ring. He was in earnest. His last sentence revealed to her something of his inner state of mind. It was like coming, in the dusk, upon the sudden mouth of a black pit. She had said, "You'd torture Virginia," and something in his reply suggested that her random words were true.

She sat staring at the set mask of his face. The old fear of him came back, after twenty years, racing up across the vistas of memory as the Brittany tide races over the St. Malo sands. In this man there was something perverted—something evil—something with which she must hold no traffic, make no bargain. She knew that she ought to end this preposterous interview—to speak a few dignified, reproachful words, and leave the tempter and his monstrous proposal.

"Virginia," she managed at last to say, "shall never even know of your horrible suggestion."

He took his watch from his pocket, glanced at it, replaced it, and spoke:

"Then you reject this offer unconditionally?"

"As you foresaw that I should!" she cried, with a burst of tears, hastily choked back.

"Oh, pardon me. I foresaw nothing of the kind. You forget that in old times I knew you rather well, and I never thought you a fool."

"But you are impossible—outrageous!" she expostulated. "Why should you want to marry Virginia?"

"I'm old enough to know my own mind, I suppose. My reasons—pardon me—are not your concern. My terms are before you, and I'm somewhat pressed for time. If you refuse, *tout court*, there's nothing further to be said. I'll take my leave. But it seems to me that you might submit the case to the judgment of Miss Mynors. Tell her

that I have an estate in Derbyshire and can settle five thousand pounds upon her, in addition to what I propose doing for her family. If she has anything like her mother's eye to the main chance, she'll think twice before turning me down."

Part of the rage that surged in the woman's heart as she glared at him was sheer jealousy—jealousy of her young, fresh daughter. They had met, those two. He had seen Virginia in a picture gallery. He, a man of past forty, wanted to marry this girl of twenty! Oh, what a fool! What a fool! When she, the suitable age, the suitable partner, the old lost love in almost all her old charm, sat there before him!

"Osbert," she murmured faintly, "don't jeer at me! For pity's sake, be yourself—your old self—for five minutes! Tell me the meaning of this unkind jest!"

"Once more, madam, let me assure you that I am in earnest. I mean what I say. I'm aware that my proposal does sound quixotic, but I'll have it all legally embodied and made certain. If Miss Mynors will marry me, I will do for you what I have said. If she will not, then I regret to be unable to offer you any assistance."

He took up his hat and rose.

"May I know whether you will undertake to convey my offer to your daughter?" he asked. "If you decline, I leave London to-day. I farm my own land, and we're busy at Omberleigh just now. If you decide to tell her, I'll await the first post here in London, the day after to-morrow; and, in the event of her being favorably inclined, I shall come down to Wayhurst that afternoon."

Mrs. Mynors clenched her small, ineffectual fists. There he stood, pitiless. Her presence meant nothing to him; it left him utterly unmoved. How he had

changed from the days of his emotional youth!

He was master of the situation. If she arose in her offended majesty, marched off, and left him—to what must she return? To absolute pauperism. She had no relatives of her own, and her husband's few distant cousins had been far more frequently appealed to than her daughter knew, and were tired of helping. By promising to let Virginia know his terms, she committed herself to nothing. If there had been an alternative! But there really was not.

She, too, rose.

"I—I suppose I must tell Virginia," she said sullenly. "But I shall forbid her to accept your preposterous suggestion."

"Oh, no, you won't," he replied, again with that odious smile. "Too much hangs upon it for you. We part, then, with at least a sporting chance of meeting again. I hope I shall prove a dutiful son-in-law. Good morning."

He bowed, seeming not to notice her appealing hands, outstretched in one last attempt to pierce his armor.

He was gone. Thus ended her mission—the last throw of the dice, upon which she had staked so much!

Nothing now between her and beggary but the remains of the check for twenty pounds sent to her by Mr. Rosenberg!

#### CHAPTER VI.

Virginia, lily pale in the heat, sat at the window of the tiny parlor dignified by the name of dining room, adding up accounts.

She had given Pansy her lunch, eaten some bread and cheese herself, and left the child to her daily afternoon rest, while she applied herself to a discussion of ways and means.

It was Tony's half holiday, and he would be home, he had promised, at five o'clock, to help her carry down

the little invalid into the garden to have tea. He was renouncing an hour of his precious cricket to do this. What a darling he was! Virginia's eyes grew misty as she thought of him. How pluckily he went without things that "other chaps" had! How loyally he refrained from piercing her heart with the thought of her own helplessness to supply him with what he wanted!

Now, for the first time, she was alone with the problem created by her mother's improvidence. In all its bare hideousness the thing confronted her. The rent was due. They had always waited to pay it until the check for the quarter's rent at Lissendean came in. Now there was no check to be expected. If her mother's errand to-day had failed, she must give notice to quit that very afternoon. Even so—where was this quarter's rent to come from? Her balance at the bank was seven pounds six and twopence.

The furniture must be sold. This, with her mother's pretty things, would pay the landlord. Afterward—what?

The sweet eyes grew dim with a bewildered pain. Why had Gerald Rosenberg gone away without a word? Yet, when she asked herself why not, she had no intelligible answer to give. Nothing had passed between him and her, in words. Only she had been conscious of his unceasing, absorbed attention, given to herself, whenever they had been in company. There had been a tiny, secret thread of mutual understanding—or so Virginia had thought. It now appeared that she had been mistaken. There had been nothing between them. It was like brushing gossamer from before one's eyes. It had been there, but it was nothing. The first strong light of reason dispersed it. Something that had been very sweet, very poignant, had come to an end. While telling herself that it had all been her own fancy, inwardly she knew it was not so; there had been something.

But it had been only gossamer—just midsummer madness.

Now that the doom had fallen, she would never see the Rosenbergs again. She would have to be a governess, if such a post could be obtained.

Keenly she wondered what was passing between Mrs. Mynors and her old lover. Though her nature revolted from the idea, she yet caught herself hoping that a marriage between the two might come about. If this Mr. Gaunt—what an uncomfortable name!—was ready to take his former sweetheart to his home, he surely would offer asylum to her children; or, if not, arrange that they could be together elsewhere.

Ah, that would be the thing! She lost herself in visions of this little home with herself, Pansy, and Tony in it—no mother to wait upon; for, dearly as Virginia loved the privilege of waiting upon her mother, she yet had to own that it was mamma who made things difficult.

Certainly, her ambitions, for a lovely girl of twenty, were singularly modest. Modest as they were, they seemed, nevertheless, unattainable.

She shut her neatly kept books, with a sigh, and, as she did so, glancing up, she saw, to her surprise, that her mother was opening the garden gate. She must have caught a very early train home!

Swiftly the girl sprang up, hurried to the door, and admitted the returned traveler. One glance at the pretty, sulky face, the lids slightly puffed as with recent tears, told Virginia that the news was not good; and her heart sank to a degree so unexpectedly low that she girded at herself for a coward and a despicable person.

"Oh, my dear, you've walked all this way alone in the heat! How tired you must be! We're going to have tea in the garden, later on. Come to your sitting room. Let me put you on the sofa and take off your shoes. You'll

soon feel better." She crooned over her mother as she led her to the couch, tended her gently and lovingly, and—oh, crowning boon!—asked no questions.

The care was accepted, but with a reservation that the sensitive girl was quick to feel. Gazing on the averted face and pouting lips, she could almost have thought that mamma was vexed with her, had that not been impossible under the circumstances. What was it? Did mamma think she ought to have met the train? Or did she want special tea made for her alone, immediately? Well, that was easily done.

"Lie and rest, dear one," she said sympathetically, "and I will just make you a cup of tea. The kettle won't take five minutes to boil."

When she returned, with the dainty tray and the wafer bread and butter, her mother was sitting up, her feet on the ground, her elbows on a small table, crying silently into her ridiculous pocket handkerchief. This could, of course, mean only complete disaster. With a dreadful sinking of the heart, Virginia murmured:

"You'll tell me all about it when you feel able?"

Uncovering her eyes, Mrs. Mynors fixed them reproachfully upon her daughter; and the girl, conscious of the reproach, felt miserably guilty, though no misdeeds came to her mind.

"Virgie," Mrs. Mynors asked, in a hollow voice, "did Miriam Rosenberg, when you were in town, take you to any picture galleries?"

Virgie stood the picture of astonishment.

"Why, yes," she said wonderingly.

As she spoke, the memory of that day, that last day with Gerald, caused the rosy color to steal up into her pale cheeks. The lynx eyes fixed upon her saw, and misinterpreted.

"Did you meet a gentleman there?"

Still more mystified, Virginia shook her head.

"Virginia, think! A dark man, who walked lame——"

The girl started—yes, her mother was not mistaken; she started quite visibly.

"A lame man?" she said. "Yes, of course I remember."

Something like fury gleamed in the elder woman's blue eyes as she stood up, confronting her taller daughter.

"He was Mr. Gaunt!" she flashed.

"What? *That* was Mr. Gaunt? Was it, indeed? Oh, then perhaps that accounts for it!"

"Accounts for what?"

"He looked as if he expected me to bow to him, or speak to him—he looked as if he thought he knew me. I am very like you, mamma, am I not? Everybody says so."

"He saw the likeness, and remembered the meeting," muttered Mrs. Mynors, crumpling up her devoted handkerchief in a tight ball in her vindictive fingers. "I suppose you thought he admired you very much?"

"Not at all," returned the girl at once. "I thought he looked angry, or offended. He—he followed us about rather persistently, until Mims and I felt uncomfortable. We went and sat outside, at the top of the stairs, to get out of his way."

"Humph! He did admire you, though, for all that! At least, he wants to marry you!"

"*Wha-a-t?*" Virginia almost laughed at the absurdity of it. "Oh, mummie, don't be silly! He meant you. You've made a mistake."

Her mother gave a short, bitter laugh.

"I am *passée*," she said through her teeth. "I ought to have known better. I ought to have sent you as my ambassador. You might have been able to come to terms. Tell me," she cried sharply, grasping her daughter's wrist,

"tell me what you thought of him? Sombre, interesting—eh? The strong, silent man—that kind of thing? You must have used your eyes in a way that I'm sure I never taught you."

Virginia stood transfixed. She felt as if she were talking to a stranger. This was a mother she had never seen. "Oh, mother, dear, what can you mean?" she remonstrated, in low, hurt tones.

With another mirthless laugh, Mrs. Mynors flung back upon her sofa pillows. She began to pour tea into a cup, and her hand shook.

"How little girls understand!" said she, with sarcasm. "Tell me, now, honestly—what *did* you think of him?"

Virginia remained a moment searching her memory. Every incident of that afternoon was etched clearly in her memory.

"Mims didn't like him at all," said she. "She thought he meant to be rude. But I thought that he looked—very unhappy."

"A case of mutual love at first sight, evidently," was the scornful comment. "Well, shall you have him, Virgie? I'm to make you the formal offer of his hand."

"Mother, I think—I think I'd better leave you to drink some tea and rest," said Virginia. "I really can't understand what you mean. You're talking wildly, and I'm afraid the long, hot journey has unnerved you."

"Stop, Virgie—don't go out! I forbid it! You must stay and listen to what I have to say. Before saying it, I wanted to find out just how much had passed between you, and I understand things a little better after what you tell me. Well, in short, I have what Mr. Gaunt calls a 'business offer' to put before you, and you have until to-morrow afternoon's post in which to make up your mind."

Virginia obediently seated herself upon a chair opposite her mother, who,

between sips of tea, told her of the offer made by Gaunt.

The elder woman's mind was in a strange tumult. She hardly knew which was the keener feeling in her—her furious jealousy, or her devouring desire that her daughter should accept the offer that would lift them out of poverty.

On her journey down in the train she had been growing used to the idea. The sense of outrage that had stung her so smartly at first subsided a little in the light of other considerations. What chances of matrimony had Virginia? Since she had let young Rosenberg slip through her fingers, her mother was beginning to see that she was not the kind of girl to seize chances, even should they present themselves. If Gaunt were serious in his wild plan, and it could be shown that he was financially solvent and able to do as he promised, then she had better swallow her feelings and take what she could get.

She told herself that it was one of those cases of sudden, electric sympathy—of love at first sight. Yet she knew that she said this only to salve her conscience. She was, as her old lover had told her, no fool. She saw his conduct all of a piece. Why had he taken up the mortgage on Lissen-dean? To have her in his power. Why did he wish to become her son-in-law? For the same reason. Try to deceive herself as she might, she knew that love had no place in the man's thoughts. When he had spoken of "getting a bit of his own back," he had given a momentary flash of self-revelation. He had uncovered a corner of a mind perverted—a mind that had brooded long upon a solitary idea of grievance until obsessed by it.

Mrs. Mynors, in her subconscious self, knew all this. Had she told her daughter, the girl must have recoiled, shuddering, from the prospect of such

an alliance. She was very careful *not* to tell her daughter anything of the kind.

During her train journey, the woman's better nature had fought within her a little. She had resolved that she would describe Gaunt's malevolence, his cold-blooded assurance; then she would come forward, offer to share a part of Virginia's burden, decide that they must stand together and face what her own selfish, mean folly had brought upon them all. But as she had striven to imagine something of what such a step must cost her, she had cowered away from the picture. She *could not* face beggary. She had begun to temporize. How did she know the exact position of affairs? It was possible that, strive though he might to conceal it from her, the man was in love. She had determined upon her course of action. She would tell Virginia how Gaunt had watched her in the gallery. The girl's own demeanor should give her the cue as to whether or not she should proceed to unfold his proposal. If the sudden fancy had been mutual—After all, it *might* have been mutual.

She returned home. She spoke. Virginia betrayed consciousness. Before the mention of the lame man—at the very memory of the art gallery—she had blushed, she had been embarrassed. Further questioning had elicited her clear memory of Gaunt's attention and pursuit. She had owned, with a distinct hesitation, that she had thought he looked unhappy.

That decided Mrs. Mynors. With a new hardheartedness, born of her new tormenting jealousy of Virgie's youth and sweetness, she stamped down the deep-lying scruples. She made the best of Gaunt's case, and said that he wished to come down to Wayhurst to plead his suit himself.

It took some time to convince Virgie that the man was in earnest. Yet, re-



calling his appearance and manner as she held them in her memory, the girl owned to herself that this was a man who might make an eccentric, even a quixotic, offer.

The interview was broken off short by the entrance of Tony, who flung open the front door, loudly whistling, and could be heard throwing down his books and shouting for Virgie. He knew better than to enter the little boudoir, his mother's sanctum. Very, very rarely was he permitted to set foot within its charmed area.

"I have until to-morrow's post," said Virgie gravely, as she lifted the tray with the tea things and carried it away.

The whole affair must be pushed into the background for the time being. Pansy was to be fetched downstairs, the tea table spread in the garden, more tea prepared. Tony was a willing, if somewhat boisterous, helper. He and his sister, between them, soon arranged things, and the two brilliant eyes of the little cripple glistened with pleasure as she was laid beside the wire arch smothered in "Hiawatha," to enjoy the air of the exquisite summer evening.

Virgie sat, the socks she endlessly knitted for Tony in her never-idle fingers, watching the clear-cut profile, which, she could not conceal from herself, grew ever more ethereal. Pansy did not seem definitely worse and had less pain than formerly, but she was wasting, as her sister knew.

The Wayhurst doctor was very anxious that a new treatment, in which he had great faith, should be tried. He thought it the only chance; but as it was protracted, and involved a long course of skilled nursing, with daily medical supervision, it would be extremely costly. It was out of the question.

Yet, if she married Mr. Gaunt, it would become easy. He had actually volunteered that Pansy should have all

the help obtainable. She glanced from Pansy to Tony, and at the darns on his threadbare trouser knees. She heard his jolly laugh, and also his quickly smothered sigh as he remarked that he was the only chap in his form who did not belong to the school O. T. C. He knew that the uniform and the camp expenses were beyond his sister's resources. This, too, would be rectified, if she accepted Gaunt's offer. It was a bribe of whose strength Gaunt himself could form no idea.

Later, when Tony had scampered away to bowl at the nets, and she was alone in the kitchen, washing up the tea things, she bent her mind upon the extraordinary turn of affairs.

The heat had made her so languid that she was obliged to sit down while the kettle boiled upon her tiny oil stove. Her visit to London had done her spirits good, but London air is not the best for recuperative purposes; and, moreover, she had been up late almost every night during her stay in town, and the thought of Gerald had at times disturbed her rest. Since her return—and more especially since the fall of the blow concerning the mortgage—her strength had seemed to grow less and less. The knowledge that she was almost at the end of her means, and saw no chance of replenishing the empty exchequer, had acted upon a body weakened by a long course of underfeeding. In her heart, she knew that she could not go on much longer acting as general servant and starving herself that the others might have enough. If she broke down—if her health proved to be so undermined that she could not take a situation—what was to become of these helpless ones?

The idea that her mother could help in any way never occurred to her. The three were bracketed together in her mind as those for whom she had promised her dying father to care.

Now came a way out—not an invit-

ing one, but one that had to be faced, nevertheless.

If she married Mr. Gaunt, he undertook to lift her burdens from her shoulders. Moreover, he lived in the country—the real country. Omberleigh Grange was in Derbyshire, and it must have a garden—a real garden, such as she had been born to, such as she loved; a garden in which to rest and grow strong again; a garden in which Pansy might be wheeled along smooth walks and lie under the spreading shade of big trees. These things could be hers, at a price. What did the price involve?

This man had loved her mother. He knew, of course, that her mother had preferred another man; but she, Virginia, bore a wonderful resemblance to the woman lost, and the lonely man wanted to satisfy his empty heart by cherishing her. In return, he would do for mother, for Pansy, for Tony, all the things that she—poor, loving, helpless Virgie—could not do.

The sacrifice demanded was just the sacrifice of herself. Well—what did that matter? Why should she not be sacrificed for the good and happiness of those she loved so ardently?

It really was very simple, after all.

Perhaps, a few weeks earlier, she might not have felt quite so indifferent. There had been shining gates—the gates of a young girl's fancy—and shyly they had begun to open and to show a tiny glimpse of rosy mysteries within. That was over now. It had been but gossamer and illusion. This was a real, definite, tangible plan—a rope held out to save the perishing family, drifting on a bit of wreckage. In the seizing of the rope, she herself, incidentally, would be sacrificed. That was all. Why not?

By the time that the scanty crockery was arranged in spotless order on the shelves, and the kitchen was as tidy as

a new pin, the girl had practically come to a decision. She said nothing, however, that night. Pansy was a little overtired after her garden excursion, and could not get to sleep; so, instead of sitting with her mother downstairs, Virginia remained at the little invalid's bedside, to read aloud. When at last the child slept, she was too tired to do anything but go to bed herself.

Nevertheless, her preoccupations awoke her in the early summer dawn. In her utter simplicity, she slipped from bed and kneeled down in her white nightgown. She asked for guidance, and it seemed to her childlike faith that it was granted. Like her namesake in far-off old Rome, she must be sacrificed. She remembered the words of the ballad she had learned as a child—the words spoken by the frantic father of the Roman Virginia:

And now, my own dear little girl, there is no way but this!

It was as if her own father's voice spoke to her from the grave, urging her to courage and a stout heart. The man was a stranger, the man was formidable; but she would be so good to him that they must grow to understand each other.

It was the only way, and she resolved to take it.

## CHAPTER VII.

When Virginia went into her mother's room, after breakfast that morning, she told her quietly that she had made her decision.

Mrs. Mynors gave a half-stifled, excited exclamation. For the life of her, she could not have told what she hoped or desired. She stared at her composed daughter with eyes half of entreaty, half of fear.

"I shall write and tell Mr. Gaunt to come to-morrow," said Virginia, with calm.

"Oh, for pity's sake, child, are you

not mad?" cried the wretched woman in the bed.

"I have considered it," was the steady answer. "He's unhappy, and I'm pretty sure that I could be a comfort to him. His way of doing things seems odd, but he's lonely, and I dare say he's been soured. I'll do all I can to make him happy, if he, on his side, will perform his promises to you and the children."

"Virgie, don't!" The voice was so altered, so strange, that the girl paused, wondering.

"Don't! Why do you say so?"

"Because I——"

Mrs. Mynors came to a stop. What could she say—"Because I have a lurking idea that he will not be kind to you"? But how ridiculous that sounded! And upon what was it based? Only upon the man's manner—his insolence, his evident desire to wound and insult her. Somehow, she could not tell Virgie how his open contempt had stung.

"Because you—you don't know him—you can't love him," she stammered.

"But you knew him; and you loved him well enough to promise to marry him," countered Virgie instantly. "Of course that has great weight with me. If he were a complete stranger, it would be different." She stood beside the bed, playing with one of its brass corner knobs. "You know, mamma, I am rather an odd girl," she said, with a swift blush. "I think I'm attracted to what I pity. It would be waste to marry me to an adoring husband, who would give me everything I desired. I would rather give than have things given to me."

Mrs. Mynors lay back, watching her through narrowed eyes.

"You are—yes, you certainly are odd," she muttered. "I own that I don't understand you in the least."

Virgie smiled. None knew better than she herself the truth of this statement.

"Of course," said she, "I'm not accepting his offer definitely. I'm simply saying that he may come here and see me to-morrow. I couldn't clinch the matter until we have some hold over him."

"What?" cried her mother sharply. "What do you mean by that?"

"Well," replied her daughter simply, "Mr. Gaunt has made some big promises. How do we know that he means to keep them? You say he's eccentric—he may not be trustworthy. In any case, I shall not agree to do as he asks without being certain that he will do as he offers. We must go to Mr. Askew and ask him to come and meet him, so that a proper settlement may be prepared."

"Well, upon my word! Virgie, you cold-blooded little horror!" began Mrs. Mynors, almost in a scream. She broke off abruptly and rolled over, hiding her face in the pillows.

"But, mother," said Virgie wonderingly, "you don't reflect. I'm promising to give all that I have or am. Suppose I did that, and found myself cheated of the price? You must know that I shouldn't think of marrying a man I've hardly seen, and don't love, if it weren't for you and the children. Do you call me cold-blooded because I'm careful to assure myself that I shan't be sacrificed in vain?"

Her mother wrung her hands.

"Virgie, you know that I don't demand such an unnatural bargain?"

"Of course I know that you don't demand it," was the quiet answer. "It's my own decision. I promise you one thing: If, when Mr. Gaunt comes, I feel that he is a person I never could care for—if he repels me utterly, I'll draw back. But you know, mother, you've told me one or two things about him, as he was in the old days when you loved him—and they were rather fine."

"Oh, but he's so altered!" sobbed

Mrs. Mynors from the pillow. "You would never know him for the same man. He used to be so tender—so chivalrous—so impulsive. Now he seems so hard, so——"

She broke off. What was she doing? The affair that was to bring her comparative ease, to keep her from starvation, was well in train. Should she herself stop it? She reflected that Virginia was not accepting definitely—only promising to consider the matter. Let things take their course. She believed the girl had some sentimental, school-girl fancy about Osbert! Yes, she had thought that from the first. She was wasting her compassion, her delicate feeling.

After all, considering Virgie's beauty, was it likely that Gaunt would be cruel to her? With a feeling almost like hatred, she studied the pure outline of the profile, the effect of the sunlight glinting through the brown-gold hair, the curve of the chin, the slimness of the young, drooping body, veiled in its blue apron.

"Oh, do as you like!" she cried. "Send your letter. But talk as little as you can to me about it! How do you suppose I like being told that you are sacrificing yourself for me? I can go to the workhouse, in the last resort, like other people."

"Perhaps. But Pansy can't," said Virginia, a trifle rigidly.

She took up the tray and disappeared.

The day dragged by. To Virginia, it seemed as if it would never end, and yet as if it were passing like a sigh. She felt as those who have been in a sinking ship have described themselves as feeling when the wave rose above the gunwale and seemed to hesitate—to pause awfully—before it burst.

Pansy was very insistently eager to know what had passed between mamma and Mr. Gaunt the previous day. It was hard to stave off her pertinacious

inquiries, but Virgie was able to tell her that negotiations were going on that might or might not lead to something. To-morrow would bring more news.

Thus the dawn broke upon the fatal day—a day of persistent, fine rain, which did nothing to abate the heat.

At about ten o'clock, the loud, imperative knock of a telegraph boy sounded upon the little door. Virginia took in the message. It was from Gaunt, and ran thus:

Please reply definitely to business offer, which otherwise is off.

The girl sat down, with knees shaking, staring at the message, which was reply paid. The boy waited, whistling, in the little entrance passage.

Should she give the definite answer demanded? Could she face the knowledge that all hope was over? She would not show her mother the despotic telegram. She knew that she must answer it for herself.

Taking a pencil, she wrote:

Definite reply impossible till after visit. May we expect you?

She prepaid the reply to this, dismissed the boy, and walked into the kitchen with limbs shaking. She felt as if she had defied the robber chief who was holding them all for ransom.

It is difficult to describe the storm of excitement in which she awaited the second message. Her mother and Pansy both demanded the meaning of the double knock. She replied tranquilly to her mother that Mr. Gaunt had tried to extort a definite answer, which she had refused to give. Mrs. Mynors' cry, "Then he won't come, after all," was so tragic that the girl's heart contracted.

Within an hour she held in her hands the following remarkable reply:

You gain nothing by delay. Arrive about four.

Virgie could not conceal from herself that it was relief which she experienced.

Putting on her hat, she went out into the rain, down to the town, to the office of Mr. Askew, the solicitor who had helped her with the agreement for Laburnum Villa, and in one or two other small matters. She asked him to come up that afternoon, at about half past four. Then she bought a few little cakes for tea, and returned home to arrange everything as spick and span as possible.

Her mother had insisted that the "supply" should be asked to come up for the afternoon, that their guest might not know of their servantless condition. Virginia was at first opposed to the idea, but after reflection she agreed. Mr. Gaunt must not think them too utterly in his power. She felt like the besieged citizens who threw loaves of bread over the walls, in order that the besiegers might think they were living in plenty.

Thus it was that Gaunt, on his arrival, was admitted by a responsible-looking, middle-aged woman, in a very clean apron, and shown into a room which, though tiny, was a bower of luxury. Mrs. Mynors, beautifully gowned, rose from the downy Chesterfield to greet him. She thought he looked less vindictive, less ironical, than he had seemed at their last meeting. After all, perhaps she had been fancying things. He had put on a lounge suit, and carried a straw hat in his hand.

"Well," he said, "so our young lady is considering the subject, as I foresaw she would do? She is her mother's own daughter."

Mrs. Mynors smothered her resentment at this extraordinary address. She was conscious of a hatred that was difficult to keep within bounds, but her own panic, when there had been a doubt of his coming, had shown her something of what would be her frame of mind if Virginia declined to marry.

"Virginia," said she, "is by no means my own daughter. I'm a wretched

woman of business, whereas her head is as clear as a man's. She wishes to have all that you propose to do for us embodied in a marriage settlement."

"Ha!" said Gaunt, as if delighted. The mother could hardly have made a more misleading statement. "Sharp young woman, indeed! Well, I respect her for that. There's no reason that I know of for her to trust me. Where is she, by the bye? Has she intrusted the preliminaries to you?"

"No, she has not. She's acting quite independently in this matter," snapped Mrs. Mynors. "She's not quite of age, but I have always left her great liberty of action. In fact, we have been more like sisters than mother and daughter." She dabbed her eyes daintily, and her voice was fraught with pathos.

"How charming!" said Gaunt gravely. "Did she remember having met me at the art gallery?"

"Oh, yes; indeed she did! She remembered very well!" cried Mrs. Mynors, and her laugh was nearly as unpleasant as his own.

"Capital!" was his comment. "All should go well, then. Is love at first sight the proper cue—eh? Advise me. What do you think?"

For a moment the mask dropped. The real woman looked at him through the eyes of the elder Virginia.

"I think you are a devil!" she said distinctly.

He seemed much amused.

"Well, perhaps you're not so far out, this time. I told you that you were no fool. I thought you could be trusted to prepare the way for these difficult negotiations. Now, may I see the lady of my heart?"

As he spoke, the door opened softly and Virginia walked in.

She wore her deceptive air of extreme elegance and her prettiest frock. It was a costume grossly unsuited to the tiny villa, and she had hitherto worn it only in London. Any man, beholding



her, might have been pardoned for supposing her to be a luxury-loving idler, a girl who thought of little else but appearances.

Gaunt stood up. She approached him with a mingling of shyness and welcome; her manner seemed to trust him completely, to say that she knew herself safe in his hands. It would have made appeal to the veriest ruffian, had not his eye been jaundiced by his knowledge of her mother and of their penniless circumstances. Her virginal modesty was to him merely consummate hypocrisy.

"Well," he said, "so I hear that you are not going to commit yourself until I stand committed, too? Is that so?"

She laughed a little breathlessly. His unsmiling, dark face, and big, rather hulking person, were formidable, and she was conscious of fear.

"You said it was a business transaction, and such ought to be businesslike, ought they not?" she asked. She was speaking playfully, while her eyes sought his, as wanting to understand—to obtain some key to his curious behavior. "It was kind of you to come, nevertheless," she added, with a hesitation born of his lack of response.

"I'm a nonsocial, boorish kind of person," he said abruptly, after a pause, during which she withdrew herself and sat down. "I suppose I ought to begin with some kind of apology for such a blunt offer, hey? But I'm told that young ladies nowadays like something out of the way, and you could fill in the details for yourself, I expect. You saw me admiring you that day in the gallery, did you not?"

Again the eyes, so like, so unlike her mother's, were lifted to those of the man who remembered each look and smile of twenty years back as if it had been yesterday.

"I noticed something special—something I could not interpret—in your manner," was her gentle reply. "I told my friend that I thought you must im-

agine that you knew me. I was interested when mamma said that it was my likeness to her that drew your attention. I was glad to have it so well explained."

He leaned forward, intent upon her face and her downbent gaze.

"Well," he said, in a voice that thrilled her curiously, "perhaps you think my suggestion is not quite so surprising, after all?"

Virginia made no reply. Her mother clenched her hands in rage, made some small movement, enough to attract his attention, and caught a ray of what was undoubtedly malice directed at her from under his heavy lids.

"Well," he went on, turning again to the girl, his tone subdued and almost gentle, "what do you say?"

She wavered—her color came. Innocent and ignorant of life though she was, she yet felt the immensity of the step she was taking; but, strangely enough, the fact that the man gave her no help counted in his favor with her. His manner suggested some tremendous feeling, out of sight. His aloofness was like a fine and delicate consideration.

The mocking quality in his address, so obvious to her mother, passed her by.

"Do you really think," she asked, her eyes still upon the ground, "that I am an adequate exchange for all the things you promise to do for—them?"

"Tell me, now—enumerate—what have I promised to do for them?"

She lifted her eyes then. He was not looking at her, but brushing the sleeve of his coat, where a crumb had fallen upon it. This avoidance gave her courage.

"To educate Tony," said her voice—so fatally like her mother's in its cadenced sweetness—"to allow mother three hundred pounds a year, and to let Pansy have the best advice and treatment for her lameness."

"I admit all that, right enough. Anything more?"

"To settle five thousand pounds on me——"

He looked in triumph at Mrs. Mynors.

"Admirable!" he said, with a sarcasm that penetrated to the girl's intelligence with a shock. She broke off, startled.

"All right," he told her soothingly. "I agree to that, too. Anything more?"

"Our solicitor, Mr. Askew, said there was another thing that I ought to ask," she replied, quite tranquilly. "It is that you should make a will in my favor, so that if anything happened to you, we should not be left destitute."

He once more let his mocking glance lash Mrs. Mynors.

"I appreciate my future wife's business capacity," said he, "but I warn you that I am horribly healthy. Except for the accident that lamed me, I haven't had a day's illness in my life. I fear I shan't oblige you by dying, just yet."

Virgie grew pink.

"Oh, I beg your pardon! That must have sounded very cold-blooded," she apologized. "But you said it was a business offer, did you not?"

He smiled for the first time.

Dropping his voice to a low persuasiveness, "Did you quite believe that?" he asked.

Thus challenged, the truth in Virginia spoke.

"No," she told him. "I thought it too extraordinary to be true."

"Besides," he persisted, still in that wooing undertone, "with a man who had seen you, it could hardly be—eh?"

Virgie held her breath. Something was here that was utterly beyond her. She was half terrified, half fascinated.

"Do you remember the statue on the landing at the art gallery?" he asked.

The blood rushed to her cheeks now in headlong tide. He knew what brought it; her mother misinterpreted.

"When you had gone, I went and

read the inscription," he pursued. "I told myself how true it was. Do you remember it? '*Voici ton maître*'——"

He sat and watched the memory, the pang, that rent her. The sight of it seemed to give him real pleasure. He could trace the regret, the quiver of feeling, and he could say to himself:

"She loves young Rosenberg, but she will marry me for my money. She deserves the punishment that I am going to inflict."

"So, you see, I am a wise man—I know when I am beaten," he went on smoothly. "I acknowledged my master when I found him."

The struggle in Virginia was keen. She was telling herself that this was Mr. Gaunt's highly unusual way of confessing himself attracted. If it were true that he already felt this strong inclination, then she must satisfy him; the marriage ought to be a success, since he had the desire to love, and she the will to please, to serve, to cherish. Yet there was an undernote, like the boom of a far-away storm in the voice of a calm sea. This alarmed her, for she did not understand it.

To steady herself and hide her embarrassment, she rose and went to the tea table, at which she seated herself, pouring out the tea and dispensing it with the noticeable grace that characterized even her least important actions.

She noticed that her mother was shedding tears, and the sight caused her to make a great effort and launch into small talk—of the late heat and the rain and the climate of Wayhurst. Small support did she receive from either of her companions; and by the time Gaunt had eaten a slice of cake and drunk two cups of excellent tea, his patience seemed suddenly to give out.

"Come, then, have we arranged matters, subject to your finding the business side of the transaction in good order?" he asked suddenly.

Thus confronted with the bald issue,

Virgie felt as if he had slapped her in the face. But in a moment she had rallied. He had promised to give her all she asked; could she, logically, do aught else but accept?

She clasped her hands tightly in her lap, hesitated, rose, and went to the window, gazing forth upon the little wet street. Over the way, at Alpine Cottage, the pug had managed to get shut out in the rain. It was astonishing how often he did this. It was the one thing that seriously displeased his prim and elderly mistress. Virgie's mind caught at the trifling fact, the little bit of her daily life, as if its consideration could protect her against the awful decision that loomed ahead.

"If you want to stipulate for other things, now is your time," said Gaunt, rising and coming toward her. It was but a step, for the room was tiny. "For instance, don't you want it put in the settlements that you should have so many months in town every year—or that I should give you a motor? I haven't got a motor, I must warn you."

Here was something that she could answer without hesitation. She turned to him her lovely, tender smile.

"Oh, all that! Why, I shall be your wife," she answered him sweetly.

There was a tingling silence after this artless speech. Gaunt's face fell. He looked as if a momentary doubt had assailed him. Then he realized that he must seize the chance she thus unwittingly gave him of assuming her consent.

"Ah, then you have determined—you can think of yourself as my wife?" he exulted, and turned his triumphing face to where Mrs. Mynors sat like a woman hypnotized. "Then we are engaged!" he cried. "I'm such a crusty old provincial bachelor that I didn't provide for this occasion before I left town by the purchase of a ring. But I see upon your mother's finger a jewel that, if I mistake not, belongs to me." He ap-

proached the sofa with hand outstretched. "Thank you, madam. It seems to me a most touching idea that mother and daughter should wear the same betrothal ring." He held it out to Virginia. "Put it on!" he said.

Virginia wavered. She looked from the man to the woman, bewildered by the invisible clash of feelings that she could not interpret. Mrs. Mynors hid her face behind her perfumed wisp of lawn; but then she would have done that in any case, at such a moment as her daughter's betrothal. Gaunt's eyes were alight, but, as it were, a-smolder; there was no flame in their glance.

Turning very white, the girl took the ring from him and obediently slipped it upon her finger.

"Done!" he said, in tones of boundless satisfaction. "Now we come to definite arrangements." He seated himself again, but Virginia remained standing, as if something had turned her to stone. "I live a very busy life at Omberleigh," he told her briskly, "farming my own land; and my estate is a big one. I must go down there to-night to superintend the end of the hay harvest, and I must stay there a few days in order to prepare the house for your reception. I should like to be married this day week, if that will suit you. As we both live in our own parishes, there will be no difficulty about a license. It's not possible for me to take a honeymoon at this time of year, so I shall carry you straight back to Derbyshire after the ceremony—"

"Wait—wait— No, no, Osbert! This is preposterous!" broke in Mrs. Mynors. "This cannot be! Virginia doesn't know you. She's all unprepared— Such haste is—improper! I will not have it!"

He looked as obstinate as a mule with its ears laid back.

"Sorry," he said. "On this matter I shall be obliged to insist. I must be married before we begin to reap, and

it's going to be a very early harvest this year. Don't make difficulties. Remember that you profess to be very hard up, and that I don't begin to make you any allowance until your daughter is my wife."

Virginia was reflecting: "If they told me I was to have an operation, I would rather have it at once than be left to think about it."

She spoke suddenly.

"Mother, I can be ready," she said gently. "Let it be as Mr. Gaunt thinks best."

"Excellent!" said the bridegroom. "Your mother tells me that she allows you complete independence of action, so we will take this as settled. Is that your solicitor now entering the gate? I'll give him my instructions at once, with your permission, for I must go back to London by the six train, to catch the midnight express to Omberleigh."

#### CHAPTER VIII.

Mr. Askew stood at the window, watching the figure of the prospective bridegroom limp down the road. He turned his mild eyes back to the two ladies within the room with something like wonder in their depths.

"Miss Virginia, I congratulate you," he said, almost reverently. "You have indeed found a generous husband!"

"You think—you are of opinion—that his generosity is exceptional?" faltered Mrs. Mynors.

"Exceptional? But, my *dear* madam, it is unheard of! Strong indeed must be the attachment! He told me," added the kind old man, with a smile of appreciation at the bride elect, "that it was a case of love at first sight. Miss Virginia has made a conquest worth boasting of."

Virginia stood gazing anxiously at the speaker. She longed to ask if he was quite sure that her future husband was sane; but such a question must ap-

pear too eccentric for her to venture upon it. Fortunately, the next words of the lawyer practically answered it:

"And such a grasp of business! Such a fine, keen intelligence! He tells me that he runs his estate at a profit—has all these new intensive-culture ideas, and plenty of capital to carry them out. A fine fortune, indeed! One wonders how it chances that such a man has remained so long a bachelor!"

Mrs. Mynors bridled, but said nothing. Virginia absorbed the sense of the opinion just given with considerable relief. The information about Gaunt's scientific cultivation of his land interested her. Her own father, living on his hereditary acres, had been in like manner devoted to the soil. At Lissen-dean, however, the land had starved to supply the constantly increasing demands of the mistress of the house; and the shadow of the approaching, inevitable bankruptcy had paralyzed all planning and embittered the premature illness and death of a chivalrous and simple gentleman.

The thought that this free life—of tramping over fields and through spinneys, of riding across one's own acres and watching the response of the earth to the hand of man—might be once more hers went far to reconcile the new Andromeda to her lot.

The manner and appearance of her suitor had rather puzzled than hurt her. He had pleaded solitude and boorishness as a reason for his extraordinarily abrupt tactics. If he atoned for his surprising rudeness—in the matter, for instance, of her mother's ring—by being good to his wife, and allowing her to have Pansy to stay with her, then she might be so nearly happy that she need waste little regret upon her own action in shutting upon her youth the gate of dreams.

Softly she stole out of the room, leaving her mother still in talk with Mr. Askew, finding out all she could as to

the extent of her son-in-law's means, and privately speculating as to how far it would be prudent to exceed the miserable allowance that he proposed to make her.

Virginia went upstairs to Pansy's room, to console the child for her disappointment in not having seen her future brother. Shyly the elder sister, when Gaunt was taking leave, had suggested a moment's visit to the little invalid. She had been curtly refused; he had barely time in which to catch his train to London. By way of comfort, Virgie now enlarged upon the big, beautiful garden at Omberleigh, wherein, of course, Pansy would ere long find herself installed.

Eagerly the child noticed and remarked upon the beautiful ring which her sister wore. She had not previously seen it, and was, of course, kept in ignorance of its somewhat humiliating history.

"I wonder what else he will send you, Virgie?" said the child eagerly. "I expect that, before long, lovely wedding presents will begin to come. What dress shall you buy to be married in, darling?"

"I shan't buy any," was the calm reply. "We are to be married with nobody there but mother and Tony, at ten o'clock in the morning, and I shall have to travel back to Omberleigh afterward. I shall just wear my frock that you are so fond of, with the chiffon tunic, and take a dust coat to church with me."

Pansy was inclined to be disappointed, but Virginia showed her how impossible it was for her to spend money which they had not got, and how far more honorable she felt it to be going to her marriage in things that had been paid for.

Busy days they were for Virgie, for she had to engage a good, competent servant for Laburnum Villa, and also to make arrangements with their doctor

for Pansy to try the treatment he had always been so eager to recommend. Everything had been so ordered that it might be fully in train by the wedding day—that her mother might not feel too much inconvenienced by the departure of her devoted maid-of-all-work.

Perhaps the most difficult task of all that fell to the bride was the writing of her news to Miriam Rosenberg.

Long did she sit with the tip of her penholder laid thoughtfully on her lip, her eyes gazing gravely forth, but seeing nothing. She felt that the extraordinary circumstances needed some handling. She must try to put things in their most favorable light, without actually violating truth.

It was only a few days before her day of doom that she finally achieved the following:

MY DEAREST MIMS: I am writing a line to tell you a piece of news that will, I think, astonish you. I am going to be married! More surprising still, I am going to be married next Tuesday! It sounds wild, I know, considering that, when I was with you, there was no such idea; but it is not quite as sudden as it seems, for Mr. Gaunt is a very old friend, and knew mother before I was born. He is being most incredibly good, and is to provide for mother, Pansy, and Tony. Is it not wonderful? Like a story in a book! He lives in Derbyshire, and has a big estate, so I shall be in the country, as in old days, and you know how I love a country life. When we are settled down, you must come and stay with us.

Nobody is invited to the wedding, Mr. Gaunt having no near relatives. It is to be early in the morning, with only mother and Tony present, as we have a long way to go afterward.

I send you much love, and I shall never forget my happy visit to Bryanston Square and all your goodness to me. Your constant friend,  
VIRGINIA MYNORS.

For the two days that followed the dispatch of this letter, Virginia lived in secret suspense. She did not really believe that there was any likelihood that Perseus, in the handsome person of Gerald Rosenberg, would arrive to unchain her from her rock; yet the tiny



hope that he might fought and struggled within her. Each time the postman passed she felt her heart lift in her side. Each time the bell rang she wondered whether there might not be a tall figure waiting on the other side of the door.

As might have been expected, no such thing happened. A letter came from Mims by return of post, full of sympathy and excitement, and stating that a consignment of wedding presents had been dispatched. In fact, Mr. Rosenberg, senior, was so transported with gratitude to Virginia for refraining from becoming his daughter-in-law that he bestowed a set of ermine furs fit for a princess. Mims sent a mirror in a silver frame, and Gerald a pendant.

Except for a silver cream jug from Mr. Askew, these were the only presents the girl received. Tony and Pansy almost broke their hearts at being unable to give anything, until Mrs. Mynors, roused to most unexpected generosity, allowed them to go shares with her in pressing upon Virgie's acceptance some articles of her mother's silver toilet set—brush, comb, and so on.

Small time had the bride for reflection until the dawn of the fatal day.

The rain had changed the weather. The heat was no longer great—in fact, the day was chilly and gray, with a gusty little wind that blew up the dust in sudden puffs.

The bride's toilet, of pale blue over white, was extremely pretty.

As she stood in the drawing-room, waiting for the fly that would drive her, her mother, and Tony to the church, Mrs. Mynors thought she had never seen a more perfect picture of girlish fairness. Excitement and nervous trepidation had chased away the pallor with which a sleepless night had invested her. Up to the last moment she had been at work upon this and that—rearranging her own room to accommodate

the professional nurse who would be in charge of Pansy during her treatment; trying to think out and plan everything so exactly that her mother would not be able to upset it afterward. It was not until nearly two o'clock in the morning that she finished her own packing and lay down to the thoughts of dread unspeakable with which she now knew that she regarded her approaching marriage.

Since the day of Gaunt's visit her mother had hardly spoken to her. Her silence had not been exactly hostile, but it had been very wounding. It was as if she had suddenly discovered that her daughter was not the girl she had taken her to be; as if the poor child were abandoning her home and duties to make a rich marriage—leaving her mother to pine in the little villa, cut off from all her own set. There was nothing to take hold of; nothing that Virginia could plead against; it was just an atmosphere of coldness, of pained surprise, that seemed to the depressed girl the last straw.

With her usual patience, she shouldered the burden, and bore it. She guessed, with her quick, sensitive sympathy, that perhaps it hurt mamma less to adopt this attitude. Her daughter was sacrificing herself to her family; to admit this stunning weight of obligation must, of course, be painful, and mamma always shrank from painful things. She had discovered this pose of hers as a kind of refuge from humiliation. Virgie accepted it meekly. Nevertheless, the tears that it wrung from her in the darkness of her last night at home were bitter, and could not be checked for a long time.

The knowledge that Gaunt was in town—that he had arrived by the last train the previous night, and was putting up at the Ducal Arms, near the station—seemed to render sleep impossible. She could not tell why.

Not till five o'clock had struck was

she compelled by mere exhaustion to close her eyes and sleep.

All her life, Virginia's appetite had been poor, and the least excitement was wont to deprive her of it altogether. As a result of this, she had eaten, during the past ten days, barely enough to keep her alive. There was nobody to notice what she ate, or whether she took a sufficient quantity. As she had been undernourished for the last two years—with the sole exception of her fortnight with the Rosenbergs, during the greater part of which mental agitation had made it difficult for her to eat—she was in a state of real debility.

Wholly inadequate did she feel for what lay before her—the new beginning, the effort to understand the unknown being whom she was to marry, the settling into strange surroundings.

Her weakness and discouragement were so profound that by the time she had arisen, dressed, and passed through the sharp and biting agony of her parting from Pansy, she was reduced to a state of passive endurance.

All the way to church she talked feverishly, eagerly, to Tony, of what they would do in the future. She would pay his pocket money out of her own allowance; he was to join the school O. T. C. at once, so that he might go into camp at the end of the term—

In such plans as these lay her only anodyne.

Her mother was reduced to complete silence. In the mind of Mrs. Mynors, she herself was the interesting and tragic heroine of this occasion. She, in all her beauty, all her desolation, had been passed by in favor of her inexperienced, immature daughter. The pathos of her position—left in Laburnum Villa, while Virginia went to take up a place in county society—flooded her with self-pity. Never had she felt capable of such an intensity of emotion as upon this day, when she was carried helpless to church to give her daughter

away. Never had she come so near to being primally and brutally elementary as at the moment when the carriage stopped at the church door and Gaunt came forward, greeting her with:

"Good morning, mother-in-law!"

She drew in her breath with a sound like a moan. But in a flash she saw that she must make no manifestation; the time for that had gone by.

As she moved up the church aisle, side by side with her daughter, she realized two things, sharply and simultaneously: One, that she could and ought to have prevented this marriage; the other, that it was now too late.

What was Gaunt's plan she could not exactly know. If it was simply to mortify her, then she could not see why he should be unkind to Virgie. Yet she distrusted and feared him. And she had given no warning to the simple creature at her side, going like a lamb to the slaughter, blind to all life's mysterious issues, blind to the sinister motive that her mother so clearly saw behind Gaunt's eccentric marriage.

For Virginia, the old truth held good that at the actual moment of a dreaded crisis one ceases to realize what is happening. The service struck her with a sense of detachment. She heard it with interest, almost for the first time. The vows were indeed comprehensive. One had, however, the comforting knowledge that the vowing was mutual. He promised things, as well as she. There was a curious consolation in the reflection that he vowed to love, cherish, and even worship his wife. There seemed nothing detached about his own participation in the rite. He grasped her fingers so strongly as almost to give her pain as he vowed "to have and to hold."

And now it was done, and there was no more use in wondering whether one had been right or wrong.

The bare and unadorned service was quickly over. The elderly vicar read a short and platitudinous address to the

newly married, out of a small book. Gaunt took his wife's hand, placed it on his arm, and marched her into a stuffy vestry, wherein she was to write for the last time her name—Virginia Mynors.

She wrote it, and, turning, fixed her troubled gaze upon her mother with an expression so bewildered, so lost, that it pierced through even the crust of egotism. Mrs. Mynors began to gasp hysterically; but, after a momentary fight for composure, managed to say:

"Osbert, Osbert, I conjure you! Be good to her! Be good to my Virgie!"

"My dear mother-in-law, I promise you that Virgie shall have the treatment she deserves," was his reply. "Come, Mrs. Gaunt, we must be off, if we are to catch the London train."

Virginia was now quite numb. She took his arm because he offered it, and because there seemed nothing else to do. They were at the church door. She broke away from Gaunt, to fling her arms around Tony. The boy was radiant, showing her, with glowing eyes, a sovereign that his new brother-in-law had just bestowed. The sight did more to encourage the bride than might be supposed. She kissed her mother next, finding it out of the question to give any parting message or direction, because the attempt to articulate would have let loose a flood of feeling hardly complimentary to her husband.

Then she was in the carriage, alone with the man who was to walk through life at her side. Still the merciful numbness held her.

Gaunt, in an unconcerned way, said he thought they had better lunch at the Savoy, and she agreed, not knowing what he had said. He made one or two other trifling remarks concerning the disposal of her luggage, which awaited them at the station.

They found the train, and he put her in, walking away himself and returning with the news that all the trunks

were safe and in the van. He laid upon her lap a pile of magazines and one or two novels.

"I hate talking in a train," he remarked.

She could have loved him for such marvelous consideration.

He had a small bag, stuffed with legal-looking documents, which he diligently perused. Virginia, thus released momentarily from strain, lay back against the cushions. The breeze fluttered into the carriage, sweet with the breath of summer. She tried to rest and not to think.

It was impossible not to think, however. Her thoughts were glued, as it were, to the consideration of this man to whom she was so strangely tied.

"He loved me at first sight. He guessed who I was. He got into communication with mother in order to be introduced. He suggested marriage there and then. When will he begin to woo me? What will he tell me? What shall I answer? Shall I be able to help flinching, letting him see how abjectly afraid I am?"

He did not put her to the test. Was it possible that he divined her exhaustion, and respected it?

She was still wondering when the nonstop express ran into the terminus. He put her into a taxi while he went and checked their baggage. Then he rejoined her, and directed the driver to the Savoy restaurant.

They were in good time, and able to secure a table near a window, whence could be seen the waters of the Thames, the endless movement of the traffic on the Embankment, the brilliant flowers of the public gardens.

The beauty of it revived Virgie a little. She ate some lunch, drank a glass of champagne, and began to make small, shy comments upon the scene, to which her husband listened tolerantly, but not as if interested. She reflected that she

must seem to him altogether young and childish.

Her slender grace and charm drew many eyes. As Gaunt glanced about him, he was keenly conscious of this. Presently he leaned back, with the smile that his mother-in-law hated.

"Glad you are pleased," said he. "Make the most of it. You are going to be buried in the heart of the country from to-day onward."

She laughed lightly.

"That will be no hardship," said she. "What I shouldn't like would be to be buried in the heart of London. The walls in London seem as if they must fall down and crush you—so near together. Have you ever felt that?"

"I don't like London."

"Then that is one taste we share," said she thoughtfully, leaning back to survey him. "How strange that I should know so little of your tastes! We shall have to begin at the very beginning, shall we not?"

"The beginning of what?" asked Gaunt.

"Of acquaintanceship," she answered.

"Pardon me. I know you through and through. You haven't a taste, a habit, nor an idea that I am not intimately acquainted with. Gives me an unfair advantage, does it not?"

"If it's true, it does indeed. But I don't think it's true," was her frank answer.

He gave something between a grunt and a laugh.

"You aren't competent to form an opinion," he replied, looking at his watch. "It's now five minutes to two," he went on, "and our train leaves St. Pancras at three. What will you do? I'm going to have a smoke. Perhaps you'd like to lie down and rest a while—eh?"

It was so exactly what she craved that she thought his sympathy wonderful. That he was dismissing her to solitude on her wedding day, while he

smoked, did not occur to her. She thanked him quite eagerly, a maid was summoned, and she was shown into a room with a deliciously downy bed. The maid removed her hat, took off her shoes, drew the blinds, and left, promising to call her in plenty of time.

She could not sleep, but the silence and the recumbent posture helped her. She went down to the entrance hall after her rest, feeling much more able to endure the remainder of her journey than she had dared to hope.

## CHAPTER IX.

Virgie awoke, so to speak, from her numbness, in the train, somewhere between London and Derby.

She was sitting, with her pile of light literature and fashion papers, opposite the man who had married her, and who was to all appearance immersed in the folios of blue foolscap that he was marking here and there with a red pencil. The documents seemed, as far as she could judge, to be leases; at least, they contained such words as "mesuage," "acres," "boundaries," and so on.

The motion of the train had lulled her into a short nap, and it seemed as if it were quite suddenly that she was wide awake and pinching herself to make sure that it was not all a dream.

Here was a man who had, as it were, leaped at a girl, and married her in such hot haste that there was no time for reflection. One argued, one assumed, the strong feeling that made such behavior credible. Yet now he sat, as a man twenty years married might sit, marking passages in a lease with a red pencil, while his few hours' bride, in all her delicate loveliness, faced him, neglected, ignored. Surely this was puzzling!

Had she but known, her own demeanor was much more surprising to him than his could be to her. He was

wondering when an outburst of wounded vanity would come—how much longer she could refrain from comment upon his behavior. Surely she must be piqued beyond endurance—she who thought the world not good enough for the treading of her feet and believed every man to be her slave!

His seemingly absorbed attention had, as a fact, hardly wandered from her for an instant since they had met that morning; and the results of his observations were not according to his expectation. So far, she had not merely been pliant; she had seemed grateful for kindness. Of course, he knew her to be badly frightened. At the Savoy, for a few minutes, under the influence of gay surroundings and champagne, there had been, as he thought, a glimpse of the real woman—the coquette incarnate. It had, however, vanished the moment he had set his heavy hand thereon.

Now she sat before him in her Dresden-china daintiness, a picture of luxury, carefully tended down to her very finger nails. While she slept, he had perused the features that moved him so vitally—the well-remembered breadth of brow and pointedness of chin, the deep setting of the shadowy eyes, the lines of the throat, the base of which rose milky from its setting of misty chiffon.

As soon as she stirred, he returned to his blue foolscap. Now she was returning his compliment—studying him.

Reluctantly she found that experience was confirming the judgment she had formed instantaneously at the art gallery. She did not like her husband's face, and could hardly say why this was so, since in a virile, somewhat rough-hewn fashion his features were good. She was just saying to herself, "It is the expression that is wrong—it must be the expression," when he raised his head, met her eyes, and smiled in the way she was learning to dislike.

"Well, don't you think I am an ideal husband?" he asked.

She answered his smile.

"That remains to be seen," she countered.

"At least," he said, "I fulfill the one essential condition, don't I? The one thing needful for husbands?"

"What is that?"

"Why, a long purse, of course."

She colored warmly, and showed, by downcast eyes and close-pressed lips, how this wounded. She felt that she had nothing to say in reply, except a low, reproachful "Oh!" in the shock of such unkindness.

"Not very tactful of me, was it, to taunt you with the amiable weakness that has procured me the lifelong privilege of your society?"

"Amiable weakness?" she repeated vaguely.

"The woman's desire for physical comforts, luxury, and so on, at any cost."

"Oh," murmured Virgie, "I don't think—indeed, I don't think you understand."

"No? We must discuss the matter at greater length. But as I told you this morning, I dislike talking in the train. We shall be at Luton in a minute, and I telegraphed for a tea basket."

The train slowed down as he spoke. He rose, leaned from the window, and took the tray from the boy who was waiting on the platform.

Virginia poured out the tea and dispensed the bread and butter and cake, with a sinking heart.

Of all the things she had anticipated, unkindness from her newly made husband had been farthest from her thoughts. Her maiden terrors had concerned themselves in the opposite direction. She had feared demonstrative displays of feeling which as yet she must be unable to reciprocate.

His attitude froze her timid efforts to make friends. The remaining words



that passed between them during the journey were negligible, except once, when he looked up suddenly—they were passing a lonely stretch of moorland, and he had been gazing from the window—and said:

"So you think you will like living in the country?"

"I know I shall. I've always lived in the country," she replied.

"Not with me," was his comment, while a faint smile crossed his eyes.

"No, not with you," was her gentle answer.

She wanted to speak to him—to tell him how well she meant to keep her new-made vows—that though her marriage was, as he must know, a marriage of convenience, she intended to do her duty to the utmost limit of her powers. But he had said that he did not like talking in the train, and her spirits were so exhausted that she dared not risk a breakdown. She remained, therefore, wrapped in the silence that seemed the sole alternative, until they reached their journey's end.

A brougham awaited them, drawn by a pair of fine horses. There followed a drive of more than five miles, through country that grew each moment wilder and more beautiful. They came at last to a pine wood, set among swelling uplands. A lodge gate here flanked the road, and, as the lodge keeper's child opened it and touched his forelock, Virginia guessed that they were in their own domain.

The trees were so thick and dark as to produce a premature twilight, through which they drove for the better part of a mile. The name of Omberleigh had been well chosen; it was, indeed, a place of shadows.

The house stood in the depths of the wood, so far as the side from which they approached was concerned. It was a Georgian house, straight and square, with a classic porch of gray stone supported upon columns. The house door

stood open, revealing a dark hall, somewhat untidy, and furnished with big black cupboards, surmounted by foxes' heads, antlers, and stuffed fish.

On its shabby Turkey carpet stood an elderly manservant, a middle-aged parlor maid, and a gray-haired woman who was, presumably, a cook-housekeeper. All of them looked as if they were patiently trying to grapple with undeserved calamity in the shape of a new mistress.

"Mrs. Wells, this is my wife," said Gaunt in tones that sounded as if he were trying to conceal his triumph.

"I'm sure I wish you joy, ma'am," replied Mrs. Wells, with an implied despair of the fulfillment of any such wish.

Virginia was used to a large household. She slipped off her glove and shook hands kindly with Mrs. Wells.

"Thank you so much! I'm sure I shall be happy in this beautiful place," she said cordially.

"This is Hemming, who has been with me a great many years," went on Gaunt, indicating the manservant, who murmured, "Namely, fifteen," as he shyly shook hands with the fair creature standing there, as they afterward remarked, like a fairy strayed in from the woods.

"And this is Grover, who will wait upon you," he went on. "Grover, you had better take Mrs. Gaunt straight upstairs. Hemming, let the men carry up the luggage into Mrs. Gaunt's room forthwith."

"This way, ma'am," said Grover distantly.

She took the dust cloak Virgie had slipped off, flashing a glance of reluctant admiration, as she did so, at the pretty frock displayed. The staircase was on the dark side of the house, and the corridor above seemed very somber to the girl, as she followed her guide.

Her bedroom was large and old-fashioned, with three high sash windows,

set deep in the walls. This lay on the other side of the house, and the bride stepped forward into the full glory of a sunset, far over land that sloped downward in a wide prospect.

Grover was pleased at the involuntary cry of pleasure the new mistress gave as she went to one of the windows and gazed out. She thawed a little as she pointed out to the eager girl the fine hill that was the pride of their part of the county—Gladby Top.

The men brought up the boxes, and by the time she had Virginia arrayed in the frock that young Mr. Bent had so much admired in Bryanston Square, Grover had laid aside the greater part of her resentment and was inclined to think that very few of the neighboring families could show anything in the way of a bride approaching the quality of the specimen just brought to Omberleigh.

"You can excuse him and understand him, if you take what I mean," she said later on in the kitchen. "Most times there's really no knowing what it is as takes their fancy when they get to his age. But with her—well, I don't see how he could help himself! If she was to be had, right he was to snap her up. What seems odd to me is that she should have taken him, for you can see she's a tip-topper—none of your soap makers' daughters, but real gentry."

She showed the bride downstairs into the drawing-room with an uncomfortable feeling that it was not an adequate setting for so fair and youthful a presence.

Virginia had not lingered over her dressing, and found that there was half an hour yet before dinner would be served. She stood in the long, bare room, probably last refurnished in the '60's, and gazed about her forlornly. This room was on the sunny side of the house, and its windows opened upon a

paved terrace with an Italian balustrade in stone.

She strayed across the Brussels carpet to the window, and stood there, gazing out upon the falling slopes of a garden—yes, a garden, but, as it seemed to her, a somewhat bare one. There was just enough bedding out to make a meager display, but when she thought of the flaming herbaceous flowers that ought to fill those long border edgings—of the Alpine plants that ought to bloom from every cleft in those limestone walls—she sighed at the thought of wasted opportunities. The tastes of the master of the house were not for horticulture, it appeared.

The thought of his sneer at her for a mercenary marriage rushed to her mind. This husband—this stranger—what manner of man was he? What was to be her fate at his hands?

Doubt and terror turned her blood to water. She put her two hands to her throat to keep down the swelling sobs. Then she turned swiftly, instinctively backward, and saw that Gaunt had noiselessly entered, and stood just behind her.

"Well," he said, "it is done now. The trap has closed behind you, and you can't get out. What do you think of your life sentence?"

A sudden determination came to her not to show fear. His manner was that of one grimly jesting. She answered playfully:

"I think my jailer likes to tease."

"Well," he went on, "you walked into the snare with your eyes open. You knew nothing of me, did you, beyond the one glorious fact that I am rich? Nothing else mattered. My negligence, my rudeness, my neglect, could not drive you from your purpose. True daughter of Virginia Sheringham, you have made your bed, and now you must lie upon it."

His wife's eyes flashed, and her answer came clearly:

"Pardon me! You say that I knew nothing of you but that you were rich. That is not true. I knew that you were a man of whom my own mother thought so well that she engaged herself to marry you. I knew, also—or guessed—that you were lonely and unhappy. I could see that you were—lame—"

"What?" he cut her off short. "You have the assurance to tell me to my face that my infirmity was a reason for your marrying me? You thought that you could elude the vigilance of a lame man—was that it? But though I limp, I am no cripple. In fact, I am particularly active—active enough to guard you very carefully, as I warn you."

Bewildered though she now was—roused to hot indignation—Virginia felt her spirits rise defiant for a moment.

"A husband should guard his wife, and I hope you will guard me," she replied promptly. "But you speak as if you intended to hold me captive. What do you mean by that?"

"I mean," he said, measuring his words and keeping his eyes steadily upon her, "to undertake the task of your reformation. I'm going to turn you into something human—into a feeling, breathing, if necessary, a suffering woman. I'm going to take away your false standards, to humble your vanity, to mortify your avarice. You shall see yourself, Virginia Gaunt, as you really are! Your outward beauty, upon which you trade, as your mother traded, is nothing to me but a whip, reminding me of the fool I was in my youth."

She was white now. Only her force of will kept her upon her feet. The insulting words stormed at her brain and filled her with despair.

"You say this to me—to your wife? Is it fair, do you think? I haven't deceived you. You never asked me to give you love. I mean to keep my promises, without the goad of threats. If—if I did wrong in accepting what

you offered, I am sorry. I want to do my duty, if you will help me. But don't make it too—difficult."

"Excellent!" he commented. "A picture of wifely submission! We shall make something of you yet, in time, perhaps. Meanwhile, it is as well to warn you that yours is to be no life of luxury. You must work, my girl—work, do you hear?"

"That will be nothing new," she replied tremulously. "I'm used to hard work."

He laughed out. She looked like a creature whom the weariness of toil had never touched. He was convinced of her idleness and frivolity.

"You look like it!" he taunted her. "Your mother looks like it, too! She fluttered into her Dover Street club clad like Solomon in all his glory, and with no more concern about the cost of her finery than the lilies of the field! Women! They call themselves our equals, and that's the kind of thing they are!"

He was mounted upon his hobby now, and his words came fluently enough.

"She was young—your mother—when she jilted a poor man to marry a rich one. Bernard Mynors had money. I had none, and was not likely to inherit any, as far as she knew. Afterward, I remember how careful she had been to ascertain that there was another heir—a life between me and my accession to this property! Well, as a matter of fact, that life failed. I came into my estate not so many years after my jilting. Meanwhile, her husband had been steadily losing what was his one attraction for her. The fact that her selfish extravagance caused his ruin mattered nothing to her. And by the Lord, when she was a needy widow, and I was a rich man, she would have married me, had I held up a finger. Do you deny it?"

Virginia was gasping for breath—as if hands that she had grasped when

drowning were about her throat, holding her down under water. This outburst of vituperation shook her very being. Coming from a man so taciturn, so unwilling to speak, as she had hitherto found him, it was paralyzing.

"But—but," she brought out at last, "but if this is what you think of me, why—why have you married me?"

"Because I determined to snatch you, while you are young, out of the bad influences that have surrounded you," was the instant reply. "As you point out, I have married you. You may not be irreclaimable. But, whether or not I can change your nature, I swear I will change your habits. I have you here safe, far from temptations, and you will do my will and suffer my will, from henceforth. I hold it to be necessary for your discipline that you should be completely separated from your past. Therefore, you will not again see the members of your family—either here or elsewhere. Don't think that you can escape from me. I shall carry out what I have undertaken."

The very atrociousness of his words brought back to her some of her dignity, a measure of control.

"It's true," said she, "that I can't escape. I bound myself, this morning, by vows that to me are more binding than cords. But may I remind you that you, too, took vows—to love and to cherish?"

He bowed ironically.

"Oh, be sure that I shall cherish my piece of perfection," he replied. "And when I have broken her to harness, I may reward her with my affection."

Her face, as she met his look, was worthy of study. It was as if suddenly she had found a source of consolation in her misery—the consciousness of her own immense height above him.

"Now you have made us quits," said she simply. "This morning I was under a great weight of obligation to you. Now you have insulted me so deeply that I think it is I who must condescend."

"Take care! Take care what you say to me!" he flashed, swayed by a tumult of inexplicable feeling.

She said nothing; only she faced him, not defiant, but critical. Her look was almost pitying. As they stood confronted, the man had a strange experience. Her wonderful likeness to her mother vanished utterly. The clear, grave, reproachful eyes that met his own were the eyes of a woman of a type as yet unknown to him.

The silence was broken by the roll of a gong in the hall. Hemming threw open the door and announced: "Dinner is served!"

To his annoyance, Gaunt was for the moment taken aback, and hesitated. It seemed that his wife did not share his embarrassment. With her head high, she advanced the few steps that separated them, and laid her hand upon his arm. Together they walked out into the hall and entered the dining room, a dark and gloomy apartment on the wooded north side of the house.

Here dinner was laid, in the style of half a century ago. Hemming and Grover, all eyes and ears, stood before the sideboard.

To Gaunt's surprise, his wife began to talk almost at once. She spoke of the glorious view from her bedroom window, inquired the height of Gladby Top, and mentioned her own taste for gardening. After a few minutes of moody uncertainty, Gaunt joined in her well-bred attempt to keep up appearances; and it was not until dessert was on the table and the retainers had retired that silence fell.



## THE LAST OF THE BONANZAS

**S**EATED in the quiet seclusion of his suite in the Ritz-Plaza, James Blaine Farrell, known to his intimates back in Cleveland as "Concrete Jim," struggled to face with equanimity and good temper the fact that his only son was destitute of enthusiasm on the subject of reinforced concrete.

The trouble was, indeed, of a deeper and more chronic nature than that. Not only did young Farrell lack the least trace of enthusiasm for concrete, he loathed and execrated concrete with all his soul, and did not trouble to conceal his sentiments. To the pioneer president of the Farrell Construction Company, this was dangerously near to blasphemy. Concrete Jim bit on a fresh cigar, and regarded his offspring with stern disapproval.

"I built for you, Bobby, and I built big," he said. "Two thousand men on the pay roll—I've a sort of duty to them to see that you learn enough to keep it running after I've grown tired. No business will last long when the head of it spends his time shooting the profits on Broadway. That last five thousand, for instance. If it's a fair question, what did you want that for?"

Robert Farrell leaned gracefully against the table, and tapped his immac-

ulate shoes with an expensive-looking cane before he replied.

"Well, I guess it sounds foolish enough to you," he said, with a disarming smile. "But the fact is that I wanted it to back a play."

He might have said that he had had the intention to use the money for cigar lights, without producing a more final impression of financial imbecility upon Concrete Jim. His father exclaimed explosively, and brought his fist down hard on the arm of his chair.

"Hell, Robert! Why can't you be a man?" he exclaimed. "Play the stocks or the horses, hit the high places, elope with an adventuress, or buy just plain gold bricks—that all comes under the head of youthful foolishness. But to finance a play on Broadway, Bobby—why, it's perfectly pure lunacy!"

"Of course, there's always a good deal of risk," conceded his son. "But look at the profits, if you pick a winner! And 'The New Galatea' is a pretty good play. Everybody says it's a sure-fire success."

"What did you expect them to say?" groaned Farrell, senior. "No, my son, it's the everlasting limit. I've been pretty easy on you, but when you pull this play-financing thing, you've surely got me gouged down to bed rock."



He wagged a forefinger to assist his ultimatum.

"Know what I'm going to do with you?" he announced. "I'm going to take you right back to Cleveland and give you a course of instruction in the cement business, until you realize that money is made at too high a cost in pain and labor to be wasted immediately in backing plays. I'm going to take you out of this, before you get in too deep. It's the John B. Farrell Construction Company for yours, Robert! Now, just how long will it take you to pack some of your less fancy clothes?"

"Well, if it's all the same to you, sir," replied his son mildly but firmly, "I would rather be excused."

The situation was tense with possibilities. Concrete Jim knew himself, and he knew his son. In one important respect, at least, they were temperamentally very much alike. If it came to a final clash of wills, each would consider it a point of honor, with the most courteous expressions of affectionate regard, to go his own way at all costs. He put down his cigar, and stared. The younger man continued to contemplate, with apparent satisfaction, his own fashionable footwear.

"Don't be a fool, Bobby!" snorted the head of the house of Farrell at last. Then he added more quietly: "You've got to face it like a man. I've been to blame myself, I admit, for giving you too much rope. But you've come to the end of it; don't make any mistake about that. People don't call me 'Concrete Jim' for nothing, you know."

"All the same," insisted his son, "I can't leave New York just now, even if I wanted to quit. There's something about New York that amounts to a habit."

"You've considered the consequences, of course?"

Again Robert Farrell smiled his charming smile of the youngster completely assured of his own popularity.

"I've decided to take a chance on 'The New Galatea,'" he answered. "I'm offered a fifth share, and the chance is too good to miss. I guess I can manage to raise five thousand somewhere."

"Then I'm going to call you, you infernal young bluffer!" cried Concrete Jim. "It's a show-down." He rose, a commanding figure of parental authority and relentlessness.

"Since you persist," agreed Robert, sadly reaching for his hat and gloves.

For a space, they surveyed each other with the quiet, steady antagonism that is possible only to men bound by strong affection. Gradually a twinkie appeared in the younger man's eyes.

"I hope you realize that I'm doing it for your own good, dad," he said. "It's going to hurt me a lot more than it will hurt you."

"You bet it is," the elder man agreed warmly. "You won't find Broadway such a joyous place when you start to tear a living out of it. But it isn't easy for me, you know—you're about all the family I've got. I wish you'd take a sensible view of it."

"I wish I could, sir," said Robert, with a tinge of something very like regret. "You've always been so generous that I'd like to fall in with your wishes. But—cement!" And he dropped his hands helplessly.

"Bobby, there's a girl in it," said Concrete Jim meaningly. "No man wants five thousand dollars in a lump unless it's for a girl."

"There is a girl," admitted Robert. "But the money isn't for her—not unless we get married a lot sooner than seems likely."

"Is it the same girl—the little milliner you were so crazy about?"

"Always the same girl."

Concrete Jim shook his head sadly. It is, of course, an ineradicable belief of parents that any girl who captures the imagination of their sons must be

an utterly valueless and probably nefarious creature.

"I'd hoped for a career for you, Bobby," he said. "I wanted you to have all the fine times and do all the fine things that I was always too busy to tackle myself. And now you want to haunt dressing rooms, and talk of marrying a slip of a milliner. Well, wait till you haven't two dollars to fold together, and see how much use they'll all have for you."

"If you only knew Stella Delehanty, dad!" protested his son.

But the elder Farrell waved aside argument.

"I wash my hands of the whole business," he announced finally. "You're a dreamer, Bobby, and the world's inclined to be hard on dreamers. When you strike the rough places, remember that there's a lot of money in cement."

"Maybe there is, sir," said Robert, from the door. "But it's not for dreamers." And the door closed behind him.

Precisely fifteen minutes later, he was engaged in a minute recital of the interview to Miss Delehanty, junior partner of the Vanity Box, in the privacy of her millinery workroom behind the shop.

"So you see," he concluded triumphantly, "I haven't a cent except what I can earn, and you know what a slender chance I've got of getting rich quick by my personal efforts. Don't you think it's a good time to be engaged?"

Pretty Stella Delehanty studied him admiringly. Farrell balanced his hat on his cane, and twirled it in apparent absorption. Miss Delehanty arose from her desk.

"It's for life, Bobby!" she observed warningly.

"Nobody could say that you married me for money, you know. That's the unique advantage of the position."

The junior partner held out both hands. Suddenly her bright little face

seemed to shine upon him like a light. Farrell threw away both hat and cane and took her in his arms.

"It's for ever and ever!" said Stella.

"Oh, longer than that!" replied Robert Farrell.

Some moments later, he started and stiffened at the sound of voices in the shop beyond.

"What is it, dear?" whispered the girl.

"Hush!" replied Farrell. "It's pop!"

## II.

Concrete Jim had accused his son of bluffing, but the truth was that the bluff was on his own side. He was a big man, and, in common with the majority of big men, he was fond of the pose of undeviating strength. The effectiveness of the pose was frequently marred, however, by the fact that his heart, as is commonly the case with big men, happened, to be the size of a watermelon, and a great deal softer. As he had watched his son emerge from the hotel and disappear, a swift and debonair figure in the afternoon throng, nothing but a stern sense of duty had prevented him from pursuing the boy with a blank check.

For some minutes he had paced the carpet, fuming and knitting his brows, and fighting to dispel absurd visions in which his son appeared in every stage of harsh and degrading destitution. He had imagined the once-elegant Bobby Farrell sweeping streets and washing dishes; had seen him sleeping over subway gratings, and fighting for a place in the tattered bread line. And he had told himself that the fault would be his own, for having failed to inculcate a sounder philosophy at an early stage of his son's career.

"Foolishness!" Concrete Jim had snorted.

But the visions had persisted; they had become, moreover, curiously min-

gled with faded memories, always the despair of stern parents, that survive unsuspected from nursery days. He had found himself dwelling with a strange insistence on the occasion, some twenty years before, when the tiny hope of the Farrell household had first contrived, by an ecstatic effort, to stand erect upon his own pink, immature feet. In fancy he had heard again the voice of his dead wife, thrilling with the pride of young motherhood.

"The young idiot's due for a bump!" he had said. "But I've simply got to see that he doesn't run up against it too hard."

The key to the situation had presented itself in the person of the designing milliner, who had presumed to captivate his unsuspecting heir. With a sudden resolve, Concrete Jimmy had grabbed his hat and descended, in his turn, to Broadway, where he had hired a taxicab and gone in search of the Vanity Box.

It happened that Louisa Harrigan, the senior partner, was at work alone in the fitting room, engaged in draping the magnificent form of one of Broadway's most famous stage beauties with rose-colored *voile-de-soie*, when Concrete Jim irrupted on her establishment from the Broadway sidewalk.

Clients of the Vanity Box know that it was perfectly possible for a magician in clothes like Louisa to be alone, and, at the same time, to be fitting the justly admired figure of Miss Zona Beverley in delicate silk decorated with moonstones. For the benefit of others, it should be explained that Miss Beverley was present only, as it were, in duplicate.

Some weeks earlier, Louisa had invested the famous lady in a tight, one-piece garment, which she had proceeded to wind from neck to ankle with some miles, more or less, of a hot and adhesive tape. The tape, cooling, had hardened into a stiff shell, from which

Miss Beverley had been rescued only by the exercise of much care and patience.

Once the ordeal was over, however, and the shell rejoined, covered with pink silk, and labeled with a number, Miss Beverley was free to depart to Seattle or Timbaktu in the comforting knowledge that glove-fitting confections from the Vanity Box would still be at her command—for a period limited only by the advance of years or the commission of serious errors in diet. In the pink model there reposed unalterably every line and curve of the effulgent personality of Miss Beverley.

Since it had seemed good to the junior partner to add a waxen head, discarded from the show window, in whose titian hair and pulchritudinous features she detected a resemblance to the star of Broadway comedy, the total effect was one of startling realism.

Louisa, with a mouthful of pins, looked up from the model to discern the shadow of a man in the shop. The visitor, after the manner of men in the Vanity Box, coughed once or twice in an apologetic manner. Louisa discarded the pins, and sailed out through the swing doors of the fitting room.

She had been prepared to assure some Italian drummer from New Jersey that she was not in the market for imitation French lace. Confronting instead a big, distinguished-looking stranger in the later forties, with iron-gray hair and an appearance of careful valeting, she halted irresolutely in the middle of the green carpet. Concrete Jim was similarly at a loss. He had expected to find some frivolous minx in a tawdry hat shop, the typical "little milliner" of Broadway, a slip of a girl in soiled white shoes, with baby eyes and a slack mouth. He had intended to be rather paternal, somewhat severe, perhaps even a little masterful. The majestic personality of Louisa Harrigan, even more than the expensive set-

ting of the Vanity Box, necessitated a revision of his gambit.

"Er—my name is Farrell," he began, and took heart a little, as he observed Louisa start guiltily and cast a glance backward, in the direction of the millinery workroom. "And you, I presume, are Miss Delehanty, of whom I have heard my son speak? I would like to ask the favor of a few moments' talk with you—in confidence."

It was an entirely natural error. That the Vanity Box harbored two handsome and designing women never occurred to Concrete Jim. Moreover, how could any man think collectedly when a pair of the most disturbing eyes in the world were fixed upon him? Louisa's, you know, were china blue in color, and of the variety that the French call *troub-lant*. The moment she heard herself addressed as "Miss Delehanty," she recovered her equilibrium. She could have informed him that Miss Delehanty was away on a journey, or per-adventure that she slept. But feminine instinct whispered that her visitor, whatever his errand, had given her, by his erroneous leap at conclusions, an advantage which she phrased as "having the jump on him."

Further, it is given to men alone to restrict their relations to business partnership. When women are business partners, they are inseparable allies in every activity of life. Louisa Harrigan, consequently, merely bowed and waved her hand to one of the white-enameled chairs, letting it go at that.

Farrell disposed his two hundred pounds of well-preserved manhood on the frail support as gingerly as an elephant intrusts himself to a plank bridge. Neither the ingenious discomfort of the Vanity Box chairs, nor the number and variety of the reflections that mimicked his every movement in the manifold Vanity Box mirrors, were calculated, Farrell found, to assist thought. The sledge-hammer intelligence that never

failed him in a discussion of cement contracts obstinately refused its aid in the faintly perfumed atmosphere of the shop.

"You have seen a great deal of my son Robert of late," he began at last.

Louisa bowed again, her disturbing eyes fixed on his.

"If only the woman would blink once in a while!" groaned Concrete Jim in the recesses of his soul.

"I may say, in fact, that you and Robert are on intimate terms," he proceeded.

"You may say," assented Louisa, "that I am in his confidence."

"Exactly what I wanted to convey," he went on, recovering a measure of ease. At all events, he had induced her to say something. "That being the case, you are no doubt aware that he is entirely dependent upon a drawing account in my business, which—"

"Doesn't seem to be any of mine," interjected Louisa in the same courteous tone.

"Which arrangement," persisted Farrell, "I have been compelled to terminate until he ceases to remain in New York in defiance of my wishes. I am sure you will agree that it would be doing the boy an ill service to encourage him in his present course. Any influence that would tend to detain him here in neglect of his obvious duties—"

"My dear sir," cried Louisa, "do you think I could keep your son out of here with a shotgun?"

"I am surprised that you should expect me to treat such a matter as my son's future with levity. He is young, my dear lady. He has not the advantage of our measure of experience, for example. As a woman of the world, you must be aware that—"

Louisa rose abruptly. Mechanically her visitor followed suit.

"Mr. Farrell, you must be aware that you can't insult me in my own establishment," she said in apparent agita-

tion. "I won't listen to you any longer."

And she turned and vanished inconspicuously through the fitting-room doors. It flashed upon Farrell that he had blunderingly succeeded in reducing her to tears. In a panic of bewildered contrition, he strode after her.

"My dear, good lady!" he protested, and, as he pushed open the swing doors, he came full upon the counterfeit presentment of Miss Zona Beverley, the famous Broadway star, in process of being fitted with *voile-de-soie* trimmed with moonstones.

Concrete Jim retreated so suddenly that he came into violent collision with the swing doors. When he looked back, Louisa had returned. The blue eyes were filled with tears, but it did not occur to him that they were tears of suppressed laughter.

"I humbly beg your pardon," he said, still a little dazzled by the view of Miss Beverley's far-famed dorsal panorama. "It never entered my mind that you might be engaged with a client."

"I wasn't," said Louisa. "That's nothing but a model of one. And I hope you didn't hurt yourself, but you shouldn't come into the fitting room, you know."

"To be accused of deliberate discourtesy to an estimable lady naturally jarred my discretion," pleaded Farrell.

"Well, you were unkind," reproached Louisa. "You told me I was old—yes, you did! And a designing fortune hunter!"

"Never!" protested the bewildered Farrell.

"Anyhow, you said I was a 'woman of the world,' and 'experienced,' and if that wasn't what you meant, I should like to know what you came for."

She twisted an absurd wisp of lace handkerchief in her agitated fingers.

"And I never had the least intention of marrying your son," she added. "And I'm not old—I'm not a day over

thirty-four—hardly. And I do Swedish exercises every morning."

This last dexterous shot, by which Concrete Jim was most unjustly placed in the position of having called Louisa fat as well as old, left her unfortunate visitor in a convenient state of pulp.

"I can only repeat," he said, "that I am humbly sorry. I gather that this infatuation of my son is as embarrassing to you as it is to me."

"It is indeed!" replied Louisa fervently.

In his agony of contrition, Concrete Jim failed to notice sounds of suppressed mirth that proceeded from the millinery workroom behind him.

"If I dared to count on your assistance," he proceeded, "you could do me a service by letting me know of his movements. He has some crazy idea of financing a play, and he doubtless imagines that I shall relent, as I have done on too many occasions. I don't want him to run his head against a wall."

"I would gladly do anything I can for your son's welfare," said Louisa piously.

Whereupon, Concrete Jim departed into a Broadway that seemed full of big blue eyes, swimming in pairs and regarding him fixedly.

"Lord, what a woman!" he murmured. "But dangerous—dangerous! I must keep my eye on this."

Narrowly escaping death under a taxicab's wheels, he was recalled to earth by a loud and intensely democratic address from the driver's seat. And as his big figure receded in the scurrying traffic, two breathless young people emerged from the millinery workroom and precipitated themselves on Mrs. Harrigan.

"Louisa, you were simply great!" cried Miss Delehanty. "I had to choke Bobby to keep him from laughing."

"Yes, but look at the fix I'm in now!" mourned Louisa. "He thinks I'm you, my jewel."



"That's the beauty of it," replied Miss Delehanty. "You can be the mustard-in-the-mouth."

"Whadya mean, mustard-in-the-mouth?"

"Why, it's a sort of distraction," explained the junior partner. "Little Barney Flaherty, the hotel man's son at home, used to pull hairs out of the cat's tail to make trout flies with them. After he hit on the mustard notion, he never got a scratch."

### III.

A very short trial was sufficient to convince Louisa Harrigan of the effectiveness of the device originating in the inventive brain of the Flaherty genius. The main difference between big, good-looking Concrete Jim and the unhappy Flaherty cat was that Concrete Jim revealed a weakness for mustard. He not only swallowed it, but asked for more. After requesting various conferences on the activities of his son Robert, he insisted on inviting Louisa to dine with him, in token of mutual good feeling.

"It is perfectly true, as poor Bobby says," he remarked over the coffee cups on the brilliant roof garden of the Ritz-Plaza. "There is something about New York that's different—it's a habit-forming town. It gets into your blood. I don't think I ever knew New York before."

He glanced approvingly at the black gown that set off Louisa's blond beauty to perfection. At that moment Louisa, scanning the well-dressed people promenading among the shrubbery, smiled and bowed. A strikingly handsome woman, in a vividly Oriental frock, returned the salutation with vivacity.

"That's Zona Beverley with her manager," remarked Louisa, as Farrell followed her gaze.

"You seem to know all the Some-

bodies in town," Farrell replied admiringly.

"Oh, I made every rag in Zona's wardrobe," explained Louisa.

Farrell pondered the social possibilities of the vanity business a while. The fountain plashed soothingly; the orchestra was just far enough away; above the pale, festooned electric globes of the splendid roof garden the night sky was like iridescent velvet.

"I can't really blame the boy," he said, reverting to the subject of his son.

"Life is pretty good here in certain of its aspects. But he has got to come down to brass tacks—or to cement."

"Cement isn't everything," smiled Louisa.

"So," assented her companion, "I am beginning to discover."

He bent aside to dispose of his cigar ash. When he looked up again, it was to confront the bewildering vision, at close quarters, of Miss Zona Beverley. She greeted Louisa with demonstrative affection. Concrete Jim, unbroken to the society of world-famous beauties, struggled to his feet, and was presented in a daze. Men more sophisticated than James Farrell might have been excused for exhibiting a certain diffidence. Opinions differed widely as to the histrionic ability of Miss Beverley, but there was absolute unanimity on the subject of her looks. Off the stage, even more than on it, her beauty was an utterly dazzling thing.

In addition, she was commendably free from that quality which is designated in her profession by the term "upstage." Her manner was that of a charming child. As she took a seat very near to Concrete Jim, she informed him that she admired no type of man so intensely as the captain of industry. She hinted, also, that she would have recognized him as Bobby Farrell's father anywhere. Bobby being considered notably good looking, this information impressed Concrete Jim with a

lively sense of Miss Beverley's perspicacity and good taste.

Her manager, a small man with an enormously disproportionate brainpan, devoted himself at once to Louisa Harrigan, leaving Zona Beverley to exercise the full battery of her fascinations upon Farrell; with the result that he surrendered incontinently to the lure of New York, personified in her pictured and paragraphed personality. In less than ten minutes, when she recollected, with a start, that the members of her company were awaiting her return to resume rehearsals, she had no difficulty at all in carrying Concrete Jim along with her—particularly as it appeared to be essential to her success that Louisa should finally approve of the tea gown she wore in the second act.

In Miss Beverley's marvelous electric brougham, as dainty and luxurious as a boudoir, the quartet drove through the intoxicating riot of theaterland to the stage door of the Scala. Of all the thrills that fall to a man in a lifetime, few are more positive and certain than the sensation of his first glimpse behind the scenes. Concrete Jim wandered through whitewashed corridors and found himself upon the stage, with a gasp. He inspected strange lighting fixtures and all the incredibly crude devices of scenery and stage illusion with delighted wonder; and his introduction to the arcana of the theater left him gaping like a boy. Most of all, however, he was impressed by the figure of Miss Beverley's producer, a lean man of dark and melancholy aspect, who wielded the authority of an absolute monarch.

In the blackness of the auditorium, Farrell sat between Louisa and Miss Beverley and contemplated this novel dignitary with awe. The producer's hyacinthine locks were ruffled into stark confusion. In his hand he held a script of the play. From time to time he interrupted the rehearsal of the second

act with long arms that waved wildly, occasionally taking the stage with a leap and illustrating his own dramaturgical conceptions of the action. A slight stammer lent curious effect to his delivery.

"N-not that way, Freddy," he cried to the leading man. "You'd d-die on your feet. You're supposed to be unconsciously funny."

"But it's down in the part," protested the leading man.

"Then you can c-cut it out!" retorted the producer.

"Have a heart, Callan," demurred the leading man. "What about Miss Beverley's cue? Do I have to fluff it again?"

The producer turned up the place in his script, gave it a cursory glance, ripped an entire page out, and threw it away.

"C-cut it all out!" he said briefly.

Miss Beverley whispered to Farrell in the darkness of the fauteuils.

"Callan's frightfully clever," she said.

"I was lucky to get him."

Farrell was duly impressed. When Miss Beverley took her cue, to be instructed in pose and action in precisely the same manner, Concrete Jim's opinion of the lean man's power and omniscience rose still higher. During an interval for recuperation, when the principals lounged over iced drinks in the romantic crudity of the star's dressing room, Concrete Jim gazed with something like worship upon the producer, and wished that he could adapt his methods for use in concrete construction. The lean man, as at rehearsals, continued to do most of the talking.

"I thought when I read the thing that it was a f-flivver," he said. "I always do, at first. But now I know it's going to be a knock-out. I can feel it in my bones—it's a bonanza."

"Dear Mr. Callan hasn't had a failure in four seasons," explained Miss Bev-

erley, turning her glorious orbs upon Farrell, who shared with her a huge leather couch of astonishing dustiness.

"Of course, there's a lot more I shall have to c-cut out," added the dictator. "But I can see oodles of money in the show."

"Who wrote it?" asked Farrell.

"Oh, a b-boob named Gibbs," said Mr. Callan, referring to his script. "But he won't r-recognize it when we get through—except for the t-title. I think we'll let that stand. 'The New Galatea' isn't bad."

"Why, my son Robert," cried Farrell, "told me he was offered a share in that play."

"So he was," said Louisa, "but he turned it down."

"Don't mention it, my dear," put in Miss Beverley. "It's a painful subject. Bobby and I nearly quarreled about that. He's a dear boy, but it was a little too bad to let me down at the last moment. Why, it might have meant postponing the production!"

"Of c-course, you couldn't expect Bobby to have any b-business sense!" remarked Callan. "But he's missed the chance of his young life."

The small manager with the pugnacious brain agreed.

"We shouldn't have left the option with him so long," he said. "That five thousand might make all the difference."

"Oh, you should w-worry," replied Callan. "You'll be chasing m-money from the doors in a week."

Miss Beverley, however, clung to her grievance.

"Still, I didn't look for a deal like that from Bobby," she remarked, with an unforgiving air. "My first venture in management, too. Why, Mr. Callan, it might have imperiled my whole career!"

Concrete Jim squirmed internally. To jeopardize the career of so gorgeous a creature appeared, when you were

separated from her by only a few inches of leather couch, in the light of an unpardonable crime. When they returned to the stage, he drew the small manager aside, and remained in converse with him until Louisa hinted that it was time to depart.

The small manager insisted on lending them Miss Beverley's town car, and said farewell at the stage door with a practiced and impressive courtesy.

"Then we'll fix it up to-morrow, Mr. Farrell," he said finally.

"Sure thing!" said Concrete Jim. "I'll expect you to lunch with me."

"Fix what up?" asked Louisa, as the car glided into the night traffic of Broadway.

"Well, it isn't necessary to say anything to Bobby," explained Concrete Jim. "But the fact is that I've bought that share in 'The New Galatea.' You see, I couldn't decently allow the boy's vagaries to imperil the production."

About the same moment the small manager, racing up stone steps at the Scala, gained the gloom of the circle. As he put his head into one of the darkened boxes, two young people, who were watching the rehearsal therefrom, turned anxious silhouettes toward him.

The small manager gestured convulsively in the dim light from the stage.

"Hook, line, and sinker, Bobby!" he said, with enthusiasm. "Hook, line, and sinker!"

#### IV.

When the curtain fell upon the second act of "The New Galatea," it fell upon a success already assured. Indeed, from the moment when the leading man—who masqueraded as a waiter in the first act—had poised a piece of ice in silver tongs, and had delicately inserted it in the collar of the comic count as he bent over his soup, the accuracy of the producer's prophecy had scarcely been in doubt.

Broadway had a farcical comedy-of

the type it loved, based on the divinely wedded traditions of the Palais Royal and the slapstick; and that portion of Broadway represented by the first nighters found that it was much easier to laugh at the flagrant absurdity of the thing than to criticize it.

Louisa Harrigan witnessed the production from a corner of the box that had been placed at the disposal of Concrete Jim Farrell, in his new capacity of theatrical financier, and laughed until she cried. Particularly she was interested in the ingenious use the author had made of life models built on the Vanity Box principle. In the third act, every variety of mystification was produced by their aid, including the presence of the gorgeous leading lady in two places at once. When the comic count, coming unexpectedly upon one of these counterfeits presentments, proceeded, in his embarrassment, to put the wrong end of his cigar in his mouth, Farrell turned upon Louisa with vague suspicion.

"Yes, that was my suggestion," admitted Louisa. "They put that bit in at the dress rehearsal. Business is business, you know."

She pointed to a line on the program that said very prominently: "Costumes and mannequins by the Vanity Box, Broadway."

She was adorably gowned in that special shade of shell pink that is sometimes cynically designated in the vanity trade as "widow's last chance." Covertly regarding her, it seemed to Concrete Jim that he had never known a woman so infinitely desirable as this big, wholesome person with the short, waving hair and the distracting blue eyes, whom, a few short weeks before, he had mistaken for the most vulgar of cradle robbers. He was seized with overwhelming contrition.

"Miss Delehanty," he said presently, "what are your precise feelings toward my son?"

Louisa gazed at him in surprise.

"Why, strictly maternal, Mr. Farrell," she replied. "I told you so from the first. How could they be anything else?"

"Well," said Concrete Jim, with intense significance, "you just couldn't make them too maternal to suit me."

Louisa turned her gaze upon the stage.

"You mustn't talk like that, Mr. Farrell," she murmured. "I told you before that you're mistaken in me. I'm not at all the woman you imagine."

What Farrell might have answered was lost in the sudden entrance of Miss Beverley's small manager, who mopped his protuberant brow and dropped into a chair under the influence of obvious emotion. Below them, the house was rocking with continuous laughter.

"It's all over," he said in a hushed and reverent voice. "As you see, they're simply eating it. Three hundred nights on Broadway—I'll stake my reputation it won't run a night less than three hundred. Then a London production, and two years on the road. Mr. Farrell, you'll find that share of yours the luckiest investment you ever made."

"Is there so much money in the thing?" asked Concrete Jim incredulously.

"Barrels of it! The house will be packed to the roof in a week, and it holds fifteen hundred dollars. My dear sir, a successful Broadway farce is the last of the bonanzas! A man would be a fool to hunt gold mines, when he can stay on Broadway among the minted money."

He rose and departed, chastened with a great joy.

"You see," said Louisa, "there was method in Bobby's madness."

"My son," admitted Concrete Jim, "has shown infinitely better judgment than I gave him credit for. In one respect, he has entirely convinced me."

Louisa looked at him questioningly.

"I mean," whispered Concrete Jim, "that I coincide with his discovery that you are too good to be out of the Farrell family."

"But I told you that I had never the slightest intention of marrying him!" fluttered Louisa.

"Bobby," rejoined Farrell, "is by no means all of the family. Miss Delehanty, I owe you many precious experiences. I'm enjoying the first real holiday I ever had. At least, I'm taking the first real holiday I ever enjoyed. But the most precious experience of all has been our acquaintance——"

"Stop, Mr. Farrell!" exclaimed Louisa. "I told you I wasn't the woman you thought me, and I'm not. I've been deceiving you all along. I'm not Stella Delehanty at all!"

"Then who in creation are you?" gasped Concrete Jim.

"I'm only her partner, the Widow Harrigan, from Columbus Avenue. I was deputed to steer you up against Zona Beverley and her crowd, to keep you from putting the screw on Bobby. Oh, I know you'll never forgive me! But they were all in the secret, and you were so easy! You hadn't been here a week before you were hitting the high spots, and haunting dressing rooms, and even financing plays, Mr. Farrell—just like poor Bobby! Don't you see that you haven't anything in the world on your son—except that you've beaten him out of a share in a big Broadway success?"

This novel view of the transaction left Farrell speechless.

"And now," added Louisa, half laughing and half crying, "New York has brought you so low that you'll make love to the poor milliner you didn't think good enough for your son! Maybe I'm not, but my dear little partner is."

"But who and where is she?" demanded the bewildered Farrell.

"I don't know where she is at this

moment," replied Louisa, "but most of the evening she has been sitting in the very next box, with Bobby."

Farrell rose in sudden resolve.

"Do you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to break right in there and make that share over to him, with my blessing. It's the best news I ever had in my life. Bobby can marry any woman in the world he fancies, so long as it isn't you!"

He dashed out, but the next box was empty: Returning, he encountered the small manager.

"We are offering a little supper to Miss Beverley and the members of her company," said the little man, with relish. "It's to be on the stage, and I'm ordered to bring you both down at once. The curtain will fall in another moment."

Louisa arose with alacrity and a certain air of relief. Farrell, a little dazed, gathered her wraps and followed. A descent of tortuous stone stairs took them through a steel door into the silent gloom of the wings, just as the curtain went down. Peering, with Louisa, through a gap in the scenery, Concrete Jim watched it rise again and again before a storm of applause; he saw the shapely shoulders of Miss Beverley as she bowed repeatedly, hand in hand with her leading man. Out there, beyond the hard, blinding lights of the proscenium, was a golden sea in which faces swam dimly, and the rise and fall of applause came across the footlights with the sound of beating surf. A great part of the audience remained to demonstrate, and in the stalls he could discern a band of white-fronted young men, who called persistently: "Author!" Louisa, catching the contagion of excitement, fell to clapping her gloved hands and calling "Author!" also. Around the wings there were others who, led by the small manager, took up the cry.

"Well, whoever he is," remarked



Concrete Jim, "I'd like to know him. I guess I owe him something, at that."

And he, too, clapped and shouted. To his astonishment, he saw a tear detach itself from Louisa's eyelashes and roll down her pink cheek.

"Ye poor deluded man," she said, with the hint of a brogue that crept into her voice in moments of emotion, "and who the devil should know him if it isn't yourself?"

The curtain rose again. Concrete Jim grabbed the iron battens supporting the scenery, and exclaimed in amazement. For there, on the opposite side of the stage, leaning a careless hand against the proscenium and bowing to the cheering house as if the writing of Broadway successes were his everyday diversion, Concrete Jim saw the tall, immaculate figure of his son Bobby.

In vain he rubbed his eyes. The author of "The New Galatea" was Bobby Farrell—Bobby, the dreamer, the incurable *fâneur*, the most persistent idler on Broadway! Bobby, who had not enough brains to sell cement, was, nevertheless, able to dispose of his fool ideas for a fortune—was acclaimed by

Broadway as the latest meteor of its dramatic firmament!

As his world tumbled about his ears, to rearrange itself slowly in a new perspective, Concrete Jim's square-cut mouth trembled a little.

"My boy wrote it!" he murmured helplessly.

"We couldn't tell you before," said Louisa. "Just suppose it had been a failure? But we all believed in Bobby. You see, he got the idea in my shop, and he found the girl he's going to marry there, and I couldn't let anything go wrong. Will you ever forgive me, Mr. Farrell?"

And as the curtain descended for the last time, and a bright-eyed girl in the wings leaped at his son, throwing her arms round his neck in an abandon of enthusiasm, Concrete Jim suddenly let go all holds.

"Forgive you?" he cried. "I've got nothing on Bobby, as you say, but I'm not going to let him have anything on me! Forgive you? Why, you wise, splendid, big-hearted woman, haven't I been trying to tell you that I love you?"

"Hush!" cried Louisa. "The curtain's down."



## ART

**S**HE plays, and in the harmony that follows

Love divine calls, and you answer.

She sings, and you are borne aloft

On the wings of the darting swallows.

Pain and joy swell in your heart.

And this is art!

For what is art but a speaking soul?

JOSEPHINE FETTER ROYLE.



# THE LIGHTED CANDLE *by* ALICE GARLAND STEELE



**W**HEN I heard that Derrickson had come back after his year in north Africa, I began to look for his rather impressive figure at the club, especially on out-of-the-way evenings. Derrickson was always an antidote for dullness—I don't know why. He rarely talked, but he'd lived pretty thoroughly, and for those of us who were too bound up with business to travel, he visualized every country under the sun.

I had grown fond of Derrickson, in spite of his cynicism. He was bluntly a disbeliever in most of the things one takes for granted, and purely agnostic in his views; but he *had* views, though he rarely presented them; and for the rest, he was a man with whom one could share silence and still get something out of it.

His knowledge of men and affairs was almost uncanny, and he was, as far as the club went, a very specially bound "Who's Who," though only a few of us were conscious of the censorship. One never looked up a newspaper file—one asked Derrickson; and the cause or the man that he advocated always "went."

I found him, one wet evening, in the billiard room, watching a game between two of the younger set. But I could see, by his rather disgusted expression, that there had been a succession of bad plays. Our greeting was as casual as if we had met the week before, and I stood next to him while Tommy Markham, sprawled across the

table with a choice of two shots, took the worst and fizzled it.

"Rotten judgment," Tommy said, looking at Derrickson with the mortification a youngster feels when he doesn't come up to the mark. And Derrickson candidly agreed with him. Transferring his cigar to his lips, he put the balls back and patiently showed Tommy how. Then silently we found our way out and into a corner of the empty lounge.

"I pity that boy," said Derrickson, "when it comes to a woman. The result will be disaster."

"But if she's the right one?" I suggested, and Derrickson laughed shortly.

"Did he choose the right shot?" he asked. And I knew I had missed the point as Tommy had.

"It takes all kinds of men," I pronounced, rather banally, "to make up a world."

"Yes," agreed Derrickson, "and a lifetime is too soon to judge the worst of them. Life has some queer tricks up its sleeve, my friend, and sometimes an utterly worthless card changes the game for all of us." He paused with a faint abstraction.

It was then that I saw in his face something I had up to that moment been unaware of—a look of fixity, as if some powerfully vivid photograph had been stamped on a turned-down page, which he still saw in detail. He was like a man looking behind him, and yet ahead. At any rate, it affected me queerly, and I wondered if he had

picked up in Africa the strange expression in his eyes.

As if to bear out my thought, he put a question to me suddenly:

"Do you remember a man named Richards, Grant Richards? A fellow with rather an unsavory reputation?"

"You mean—the chap who disappeared?"

"Yes. He qualified for an M. D., but he never practiced. Wasn't the working sort, and had that curse to fight—plenty of money. Well, I ran across him in Port Said eight months ago."

"But they said he'd committed suicide."

"I know. He *had*, long before they said it—killed every decent thing in him. It was self-murder that lasted for years—not the simpler kind."

"And yet there was something——" I said.

Derrickson nodded.

"Something of his mother. I knew her."

"They said he had broken her heart, and that some other woman had broken his. That was why he dropped out."

"It was perfectly true," said Derrickson.

We lit fresh cigars, and I pondered for a moment on Richards as I remembered him—somewhere under thirty, and yet old, with a dark, haunting face and tragic eyes.

"He was a queer fish," I commented. "I can imagine his taking to strange waters."

"He was a man," said Derrickson shortly, "who had no faith. He believed neither in God, man, nor the devil—least of all in women."

"A good thing," I said, "for the woman!"

Derrickson smiled.

"It's strange," he said, "how easy it is, when a dog has a bad name, to hang him. I happen to know the special woman who sent Richards into the

void. It's unthinkable, but it wouldn't have mattered to her if it had been—hell."

I spoke rather hardly.

"Well, he was prepared for the journey. They say his mother adored him."

"And that he broke her heart. That would not be difficult, seeing they were—*what* they were." Derrickson puffed slowly. "She was New England to the backbone, fine, stanch, puritan New England. You can understand how little excuse she'd make for an only son."

"He was very little her son, I fancy."

"More than the world guessed," said Derrickson. "I've his story—to prove it."

The room, as we sat in it, was quite hugely empty. From across the corridor we still got the muffled sounds of the knocking billiard balls.

"I suppose," I said bluntly, "some of these days he'll take it into his head to come back again—if only to see what is happening to the woman who sent him there."

"Richards," said Derrickson slowly, "will never come back."

Something in his manner of speaking kept me silent; it was so final a word.

"You know Port Said," said Derrickson. "No—I forget you are not a globe-trotter. Well, it's one of the most cosmopolitan places on earth—the melting pot for West and East. One is never surprised at anything that happens; and when Richards sent up his card to my hotel, it seemed as casual as meeting an acquaintance on Broadway."

"I went down, curious, I'll own, because I still remembered the headlines of his disappearance in the papers. He looked, after an interval of six years, perfectly unchanged—the same pallor, the same arresting eyes—as if he had stopped, like the hands of a clock, at the epoch-marking hour of his life."

"He told me he had spent the whole six years idling along the coast from Algiers to Port Said, but that he'd

gotten d— little out of it. When I heard his Arabic, I disagreed with him. It was absolutely flawless. You know he had a musical voice. But, all the same, he was stamped, as he'd always been, with defeat. I took it he was just waiting for life to end, somehow—for the flame to expend itself, like a candle. Since he was not living, you could see that life didn't matter. He was like a finished story that had proved wretched reading.

"Our intercourse, at first, was embarrassed. I'd known, you see, both his mother and the other woman. But, with a sort of tacit agreement to leave the past out of it, we got on."

"Just where," I asked, "did you get?"

"I'm coming to that," said Derrickson, "presently. Meanwhile, I learned just why he'd come to the hotel. He'd been calling, it seems, on some English people from Alexandria, and had happened to see my name on the register. After inquiries, he had coolly sent up his card, prepared for any sort of welcome, and, like a homeless dog, quite disposed to be friends. Before he left, he'd invited me to go with him on a most preposterous journey into British East Africa. To be more explicit, the Nandi country."

"Hunting lions," I ventured, "à la Roosevelt?"

"Nothing so tame," smiled Derrickson. "No—moving pictures. The world, my friend, is no longer a thing to be toured in eighty days; they reel off the whole thing for us on a moving-picture screen in twenty minutes."

"But Richards—" I began.

"Oh, he wasn't in the business. It was a whim with Richards, or rather a wager. A Chicago firm, it seems, wanted one of the few 'thrills' left—a view of some Cherangang warriors, a perfectly unsubdued tribe living on a mountain range east of the Nzoia Plateau, doing a sort of cannibalistic war dance."

"It probably wasn't pretty."

"It wasn't *hackneyed*," said Derrickson. "No white man had ever seen it, but it had been fearfully hinted at by some of the niggers themselves. The story had filtered overseas, and that was enough for Chicago. The firm sent out two representatives and a picture machine, and told them to do the rest. But they farked the job when they got as far as Mombasa, and took pictures of the jungle instead. Then they turned back to Port Said, and one of them happened to tell Richards the story. Right on the spot he volunteered to go—provided they'd trust him with the machine and show him how to run it."

"And they did?"

Derrickson nodded.

"Richards, you know, was always convincing. They simply turned the whole thing into his hands, cabled the firm the stunt was under way, and set out to flirt with some Ouled Nail girls while they were waiting. It was at that point that Richards ran across me and remembered that I was an amateur hunter. It was his idea that we could kill our two birds with the same stone."

I looked at Derrickson curiously.

"Did you need much persuasion?"

He eyed me a moment.

"No," he said; "Richards was always his own best excuse. Of course, we talked the thing over, while the funny little Hindu band played English airs on the esplanade, but from the first I knew I should go. We were to get a *safari* together and travel as far as the Nandi country, taking in what game I could bag on the way. Once there, I was to amuse myself in camp, while Richards went into the hills alone. He insisted on that end of it; and, to tell the truth, I wasn't enough interested in the moving-picture business to stalk an unknown tribe.

"As far as we knew, the thing might be perfectly safe. The English protec-

torate has a nominal rule over the whole territory, and white men, even in unexplored Africa, are growing fearfully common. It was simply that Richards' end of it did not appeal to me, though Richards did. He'd been cast, all his life, for the leading part in a drama, and I had somehow an idea this might be the big act. At any rate, I wanted to be within gunshot range.

"He was quite callous about it himself—put the thing to me with a shrug of the shoulders that might have meant anything. But his eyes, for just one instant, gave him away. I saw the real idea back of his whimsical invitation—that he had come to the ends of the earth to get away from himself, and that he hadn't succeeded.

"Well, we shipped for Mombasa on one of those Red Sea steamers. We took the ordinary outfit for trekking into the interior, and two Sudanese servants. We depended on getting Somali porters when we landed. I shall never forget those first hours on board, or Richards, in a pith helmet, leaning over the guard rail looking into the heart of the sunset. It was as if he were reading into it the whole story of his wasted life. The west was like a sea of fire. He spoke to me, as I stepped up to him, for the first time of his dead mother.

"She would have believed that led straight into heaven," he said, and laughed. His eyes were as cold as iron pyrites. We were both of us startled, I think, to hear a voice quite near to us take up his thought:

"And who knows, young man, that it doesn't?"

"I can see now the old fellow who spoke to us. He looked like the Prophet Hosea in a shabby frock coat. We afterward learned he was a Scotch missionary named Ogilvie, returning with his daughter from his first leave in twenty years, who'd spent his life in the African mission field. Richards

turned him down quite brutally. I don't remember his words, but they were final, and presently the old chap moved away. But he said something to Richards in passing.

"I've had to do with blind folk all my life," he said, quite cheerfully, "and if you can't see God behind that sunset, I'm thinking you're one of them, sir."

"Quite perversely, from that moment Richards took a fancy to him; a fancy he was a little ashamed of, and that I didn't attempt to reason out. We used to see the old man often on deck with his daughter—a slip of a girl, with that pallor which is the hall mark of hot climates. Her eyes were the color of heather, but she'd been born, at the price of her mother's life, somewhere along the inferno of the Gold Coast, and the prettiest thing on the boat was the way she worshiped her dad.

"It was Richards who found out that they were going our way. The old man had a mission station among the Nandis, and the girl taught the native children. It was a case of a garden flower planted in the wilderness," said Derrickson. "The old man was like an old war horse, who liked to be where the fight was thickest. One could almost see his nostrils dilate while he plied Richards and me with his stern Covenanter doctrines. I think he saw in both of us possible converts; but Richards, being so thoroughly ingrained an unbeliever, was nearest to his heart. He was, in his peculiar way, a personality. One felt his force, if one couldn't accept his theology. He had behind his unique beliefs the motor power that rules the world."

"And what," said I, "do you make that out to be?"

"Faith," snapped Derrickson; "faith that can move mountains into the sea, England into the heart of Africa. It's all, when you come to analyze it, a matter of faith. It was the missionaries, not the ivory hunters, my friend,



who made possible the African conquest. They began with Livingston, and back of Livingston was Livingston's God!"

Derrickson broke off, drumming lightly on the arm of his chair with his fingers. Knowing him, as I did, for a man who had carefully and consistently stood aside from all creeds, all religions, his utterance impressed me with a strange force.

"Well," said Derrickson, "we went on down the Red Sea, stopping at Asab to take on a boatload of Nubians, with their native sheep and their prayer rugs. Another case of faith, of a different color; you felt it when they got on their knees every night and turned to the east. We had days of them, and their Egyptian flies, till we rounded Cape Ras Hafun. And when at last we reached Mombasa, we were pretty well sick of water and glad to step on any kind of land.

"We said good-by to the Ogilvies and put up at one of the little Africo-Portuguese hotels. I went out for a look about town, leaving Richards to attend to the Uganda railway tickets and the shooting license. When I returned, I found him pacing up and down the palm-dressed garden.

"'Look here,' he said, 'we'll get our *safari* at Nairobi. We're starting tomorrow morning with the Ogilvies.' He said it just like that, although it upset all our preconceived plans. 'They're going,' he added, 'straight into the Nandi country, and I can drop you off at his mission while I go on alone—for the other thing.'

"Perhaps I was foolish. I said something, rather coldly, about the girl. He looked me straight in the eye.

"'I'm through with women,' he said; 'and I don't mind telling you why—I'm not fit for them. You can bank on that, Derrickson, and steer your tongue another way.'

"That was enough, from a man like

Richards, and I was rather glad to know it. She was too sweet a blossom to wither at hands like his. We left for Nairobi the next morning, where we got the rest of our outfit. But it was at a little station called Kibigori, this side of Victoria Nyanza, that the real trek began. Going along with the Ogilvies had put off my chance of big game, together with some other things; but I knew I could get all the shooting I wanted on the return trip, so that didn't worry me. I was only surprised that Richards should let a desert missionary and his daughter so upset his original plans.

"Ogilvie, of course, took us for hunters or scientists or some such thing, and Richards had laid an embargo on the truth. Those missionaries always resent meddling with the natives; they think it hurts their chances. But he gave us the sincerest kind of welcome as traveling companions—always, I fancy, with an eye to Richards as a star in his crown, although any student of human nature would have guessed Richards beyond the limits of anybody's prayers.

"The old chap spoke to me about him once—asked me, rather bluntly, if I was Richards' friend. And when, slightly disconcerted, I nodded, he said simply:

"'Then, man, be kinder to him than he's been to himself. Don't let him get away from ye. He's overyoung to be wearing the de'il's nightcap.'

"It was a strange expression, yet I think I caught his meaning—that Richards had drugged his *soul* to sleep. As if it would have been the part of a friend to waken it!"

Derrickson paused to relight his cigar.

"There is a way," he said, "of getting close to a man in a queer country like that which isn't possible in your cities. That trek was bringing Richards closer to the girl, but it was also bringing me closer to Richards. He'd

always been such a rotter that I'd never given him credit for remorse, but he laid it bare to me one night when Ogilvie and his daughter, in the other tent, were sleeping. We'd been smoking over a late camp fire—for, in spite of the heat of the actual sun, an African night can be chilly—and without warning Richards began to speak to me in halting sentences of what he called the 'damned, irretrievable past.'

"I'm an empty gourd," he said, 'Derrickson—squeezed dry. If I leave my bones to whiten out here, not a living thing will regret me, not even a dog! Death will be just a black curtain dropped over the damned years.'

"I can see him still, with the dark, brooding look on his face as he kicked the little, crooked sticks farther into the flame. Well, I hauled out for his benefit my petty philosophies," but there didn't seem to be a thing he could hang to, and we both stared out over the dark veldt, thinking life, like the place; abominably sad. We neither of us slept well that night.

"It was the next morning that I noticed him riding with the girl, and was caught, not by the look in his eyes, but by the expression of hers. She was, after all, just a flower—waiting to be picked, and any man could have worn her proudly on his heart. But not Richards. The thing was impossible.

"I left old Ogilvie abruptly and went on alone. I wanted to think the thing out by myself, as if," said Derrickson musingly, "one could fit puzzle pieces into anything but the one picture they are intended for. Finally I made up my mind to say a word, a sharp word, to Richards. I couldn't for my life allow hurt to fall on that old man and his wilderness rose. And that noon, with a good deal of heat, I said it. We were due at the mission the next evening, and I wanted no sitting about their hearthstone with evil intent. I put it to

him flatly that he was playing with fire. He turned his cold eyes on me.

"I've played with fire all my life, Derrickson—I'm burned to a crisp. Don't I look it?"

"Well," I said, 'that was your concern. This is the girl's.'

"He grew soft in a minute.

"If I thought," he said, 'that she—cared—'

"Any fool," I said, 'could see that she cares.'

"Then," he said calmly, 'the harm's done. I think you'd better keep out of it. I've never allowed meddlers in my life.'

"Well, I hated him for an instant, but I kept my temper.

"Very well," I said, 'it's merely up to me to give a hint to the girl. There's got to be a way out.'

"He laughed. You know how Richards used to laugh—soullessly. 'The girl, my dear chap, already knows that life has tarred and feathered me. Do you think I'd be cad enough to hide what I am? The girl knows, I tell you.'

"Then she doesn't believe it.'

"No," he said slowly, 'she doesn't believe it. Do you know what that means, Derrickson—to have a woman's faith in you so strong that she pits it against the truth? Well, I've come out here to the jungle to learn that it's the one big thing that could happen to a man like me.'

"Then," I said, 'for Heaven's sake be a man, and carry it no farther.'

"I'll carry it," he said, grimly, 'straight into those nigger-infested hills, Derrickson, and if I die there—I'll hold it up to my eyes like a cross.' And then he turned on his heel.

"For the rest of that day, we hardly saw him—he kept in front with Ogilvie's black boys. And I wish you could have seen the girl's eyes, staring at nothing, because he wasn't there!

"Some time the next afternoon, we

tumbled into the mission compound. It was the usual thing—small, one-story building with a thatched roof, connected with a rude little combination church and schoolhouse. It was just a clearing in the thicket with a lanky garden and a few dirty natives draped in American cloth, but to the old man and his daughter it was home.

"You should have seen his pride when he showed us his few treasures—the portable organ in the church, the hanging bookcase for his worn-out volumes, and the skin rugs on the floor. A picture of his dead wife hung over the doorway, with a look in her eyes of the early Christian martyrs. You could read in her face the whole story of that winter on the Gold Coast, when she gave up her life and left the girl.

"After dinner, old Ogilvie told us stories of his work as a pioneer. But I was the only one who listened. Richards sat staring out of the open doorway, and the girl had slipped out alone to the church. We heard her playing on the wheezy old organ. It was 'The Land o' the Leal.'

"Finally Richards got up and went out, too, and the music stopped—just as it would stop in her life when he went out of it. It angered me. To have him go on draining her sweetness! I made up my mind he'd get to his moving-picture business the very next day—and then we'd trek back to Nairobi. It was while I was planning this, rather grimly, that they came in together, the girl with a high, exalted look on her face that made me dread all sorts of things, till I caught a glimpse of Richards' tortured eyes.

"We slept outside in our tent that night; I couldn't bear the old man's rooftop. But I pretended I was too sleepy to talk, and Richards just rolled up in his blanket and lay with his cheek on his arm. Just as I was going off, he said something in a muffled voice:

"I'm going into those hills to-mor-

row, Derrickson. Then we'll get out of this.'

"I'm glad to hear it,' I said. 'I'm going with you.'

"No,' he said, 'you're not. I'm taking two of Ogilvie's black boys who know the ropes. The dance, they say, is done at the full of the moon, and that's to-morrow. They're a bit afraid, but I've bribed them with my old clothes. Ogilvie thinks I'm going after specimens—and so I am—of savage deviltry.'

"I grunted.

"It's been a fool's errand. But I'd rather have you a fool than a knave.'

"I fancied I could see him coldly smiling.

"If it's any consolation to you,' he said, 'you may be sure that I'm being paid back now, in coin of the realm, for every one of my mother's broken dreams.'

"Did you ever hear a proud man strangle over a sob he'd die before he'd let you hear? Well, Grant Richards did it that night, out among the flower patches of Ogilvie's little garden. It made clear," said Derrickson, "a fact I'd never given him credit for—that he was his mother's son. I saw then what we'd all of us missed—that he was a good thing gone wrong, a fine thing perverted, put to inferior uses, because he'd lacked ballast—faith," said Derrickson musingly. "At dawn, when I woke, he was gone.

"Even then I didn't dream all he'd let himself in for. I moved about for a couple of days over the flat country, stalking one or two bushbuck along the river swamps; always, though, with an eye on those hills. But it was not until I got back to Ogilvie's quarters on the evening of the third day that I grew uneasy. I fancy I thought I'd find Richards back there, and when I didn't, something led me to tell old Ogilvie the truth.

"He didn't like it—and the thing he

liked least was that one of Richard's 'boys' had stumbled in the night before, morose and sullen. We couldn't get him to say a word, he acted as if he'd gone dumb. The old man seemed to think I should have prevented Richards' going.

"'Tis a tomfool thing,' he said, 'for a white man to meddle with black customs. We missionaries learned that in the early days, and with many of us it was our last lesson. Now we try to teach the natives ours, but we let theirs alone.'

"'But surely,' I said, 'there's no actual danger?'

"But Ogilvie didn't answer. He just went and stood at the open door, looking over the hot, green plateau. Presently he came back to me.

"'If he's not here by to-morrow morning,' he said, 'we'll go and meet him.' That was all.

"It was enough to keep me awake that night. Two months before I would hardly have thought Richards' worth the salvage. Now he was my friend. We started at six the next morning, the girl watching us from the doorway. The last thing I saw, when I looked back, was her slim figure. She was shading her eyes with her hands. She hadn't asked any questions—she had lived too much with men for that—but all the same one saw that, for her, it would be an agony of waiting. She knew better than I did the peril of those hills.

"There were six of us, with Ogilvie in the lead, and we picked up the trail easily enough. But it was not till three in the afternoon that we struck the Lower Cherangang district. The black boys showed it very plainly by squatting down and refusing flatly to go farther. Old Ogilvie coaxed and scolded, but the answer never varied: *'Mbaya. Ngoja hapa'*—'Bad. Wait here.' And at last the old man turned to me, shaking his head.

"'They won't do it,' he said. 'They're afraid. And yet they are good boys.'

"There was nothing for it but to go on, as Richards had done, alone. We picked our way in the fading light over the green escarpment, stumbling now and then on the little stones and pestered with flies. It was strange to me to see the old man trudging so solemnly over the rough trail. He looked more than ever a prophet—a voice crying in the wilderness. Lives like his make an ordinary man ashamed.

"Most of the way he was silent, but once I saw his lips move, and he told me he was 'praying for a sign.' He never thought of turning back. His idea was to go on till light failed, and then camp where we could, over a big fire, till morning, though he hoped before that to strike their village. But what we did strike"—Derrickson paused to puff a blue ring to the ceiling—"was Richards' remaining black boy, dead across the trail, with a spear in his back. He lay just on the edge of a little green thicket. The old man never flinched, but I'm not ashamed to say it affected me profoundly. There was something so sinister about the whole thing. It was like a bad dream.

"Well—an hour later we found Richards."

"Not—dead?" I put the question rather hoarsely.

"Oh, no," Derrickson smoked thoughtfully. "They rarely kill you off like that. They prefer to—torture."

"Good God!" I felt myself, at the flat statement, shuddering.

"We tumbled," said Derrickson, "into their village just as the dark came on, and the first thing we saw was the picture machine, smashed into a hundred pieces. Old Ogilvie turned to me directly he saw it.

"I knew it,' he sighed. 'They are just children. They probably thought it witchcraft—the only religion they know.'

"I think, even then, he was longing for a chance to preach them into a better life. But all my thought was of Richards. Of course they surrounded us, apparently not at all hostile, yet savage for all that, and uttering their guttural sounds. Old Ogilvie spoke to them as earnestly as if he had been addressing a board of foreign missions. He knew, I think, every African dialect under the sun. But all they would do was steer us to the headman of the village, and Ogilvie had to begin it all over again.

"He couldn't get them to admit they had an Englishman—every white man is English out there—but they had caught a white witch. They brought us out their own witch doctor to prove it. And there we stuck. We could stay or go, they said, though they politely advised us to wait till morning. But Richards they would not give up.

"The old man's patience was wonderful. Finally, after a long harangue in which I caught the name several times of the British agent at Nairobi, they led us to one of their kraals, and there, bound with withes, with an ugly bruise on his forehead, was Richards. I shall never forget his face when he saw us—he was like a man seeing in vision something he had said good-by to forever. They had gagged him with a wooden billet, and he couldn't speak to us, but when he turned his haunted eyes on us, I knew his heart was leaping.

"They wouldn't let us near him. Old Ogilvie stood in the opening with his head uncovered, and, lifting up his hand, said just one sentence:

"'If I make my bed in hell, Thou art there!'"

"It was the strangest and most personal prayer I have ever listened to.

"After that we found ourselves jerked sturdily away, but they motioned us to one of the empty kraals, and there, for Grant Richards' sake,

I spent the most horrible night of my life. Ogilvie said it would probably 'happen' in the morning. I told him frankly I'd never see the thing done—that I had my gun, and that if the worst came to the worst, I'd shoot as many of Richards' captors as I could, and afterward Richards. But the old missionary shook his head and looked so pained I desisted. He had his own plan, it seems, of rescue, and he asked me very simply to trust him. I've always," said Derrickson, "been glad that I did.

"The village was stirring at dawn, but long before that we had wandered out, Ogilvie and I, as near as we dared to Richards' kraal, with those ugly black custodians spread in front of it like a guard specially placed by the devil. It seemed preposterous to hear the birds singing as if we were still in a white man's world. I heard," said Derrickson, "more Scripture in that hour than if I'd been an acolyte in a temple. Old Ogilvie kept one finger on Jeremiah and the rest on the Psalms, and I began to think the whole Christian Bible had been compiled for men in Richards' extremity. I don't think the old man realized I was listening. He said his texts over and over, as a child repeats a lesson:

"'Thou hast sore broken us in the Place of Dragons.'"

"'Behold, I have made thee small among the heathen.'"

"'He hath set me as a mark for their arrows.'"

"Well, it got on my nerves, and I told him so. I wish you could have seen the look in those mild blue eyes.

"My friend," he said, "it's much to me to have that young man die. I'm thinking of the little girl at home."

"I knew then that he knew. Richards and his daughter were but going the way of all the earth.

"Well, it seemed an eternity till they got Richards out and prepared for their



festive butchery. They stood him, bound, against a sort of totem pole, and a parcel of old hags circled about him, lashing him with twigs cut from a thorn bush. They had taken the gag out, but if Richards saw us, he made no motion. He seemed turned to stone. I think he thought those lashes of the body less than the lashes memory was laying on his soul.

"And then they began to heap him about with little dry sticks. I knew what that meant, and I felt it was up to me to get my gun ready. I singled out the headman and two or three of the blackest of those niggers, and was making up my mind I'd at least give Richards the benefit of a stampede when I heard old Ogilvie calling across the space between them:

"The spirit of man is the candle of the Lord! I'm going to do my best for ye, boy, but if I canna, ye must try to make a good ending. Please God, 'twill be a candle, like old Father Ridley's, which will never go out.' And then, raising his hand as if he were in a cathedral, he gave them the finest flow of African lingo I've ever listened to.

"Afterward, he told me something of what he said.

"'Twas just a simple sort of sermon, man, but I've never found it fail. I've been in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of the heathen, in perils of the wilderness, in perils among false brethren—but the common Gospel has aye worked for me its miracle. It may be, too, I had the gift, that day, of tongues, for I don't mind telling ye I was thinking with might and main of my little lassie.'

"I'm giving you *his* version," said Derrickson. "I myself only saw—the miracle."

"Go on," I told him hoarsely.

"Have you ever," said Derrickson, "seen a bloodthirsty mob turn into a hushed, orderly crowd? They say it

happened when Mark Anthony spoke over the body of Caesar. Well, it happened out there in that primeval forest when that old African missionary preached for the first time his gospel of peace to those naked Cherangang niggers. At the end of it, in a perfectly abnormal silence, Ogilvie just stepped up to that fantastic totem pole and cut Richards free."

I felt my voice a trifle unsteady.

"And they let him go?"

"They sent us," said Derrickson, "back to the mission with a specially appointed envoy. They hadn't much use for Richards or me, but they treated that man like the prophet he was, from the country of the God they had never heard of. I've often wondered since whether there were any real conversions that morning—and whether such things last. You see, I am skeptic still!"

"And so," I said, "you gained the 'thrill' that Chicago lost."

Derrickson smiled.

"Not a bit of it! Of course the machine was smashed, but Richards is a Yankee. They ran those films off last week in Pittsburgh, advertised as a 'Picture, specially taken, of the New African Fox Trot.' We are up to the minute in America."

"And—Richards?" I asked.

"Richards?" repeated Derrickson dreamily. "I think, if the worst had come, Richards would have died game. He was his mother's son, and faith to live by and die by is, after all, a matter of inheritance. Some people call it the breath of God."

We sat for a few moments without speaking.

"And what," I said, "of the girl? Of course he—married her."

"Yes," said Derrickson. "God bless her!"

I have often wondered since if Derrickson, too—— But I have never

known him to care in that way for a woman.

"And where," I asked, "have they set up housekeeping?"

"On the edge of the Nandi country," he said, "east of the Nzoia plateau."

"You mean that Richards—*stayed?*"

Derrickson nodded.

"Yes—to heal the sick and lead the blind. I've often thought of the old

man's simile. It was truly, for Richards, a 'lighted candle.'"

I looked at him steadily.

"And did it all, you hardened old agnostic, have no effect on *you?*"

He rose, stretching his tall, impressive figure.

"We are all," he said, "candles in the wind. I have about decided that God sets some of us burning."



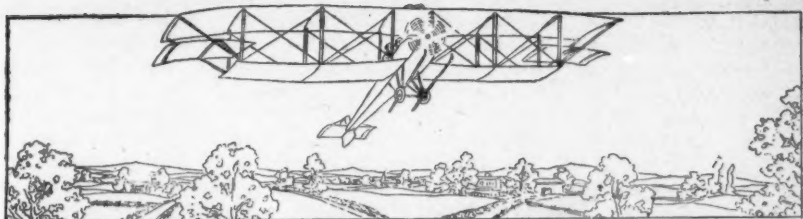
## THE VICTORY

AS townward Mistress Betty goes,  
 With tossing head and haughty lips,  
 And dainty, outward-pointing toes  
 That spurn the path o'er which she trips,  
 She recks not how yon sleek young blades  
 Begin to ogle, smirk, and pur,  
 Nor yet how all the kerchiefed maids  
 Are whispering after her.

As Betty goes, she walks alone,  
 Her gathered kirtle in her hand;  
 She curtsies not to any one,  
 She sees no smiles, however bland.  
 Her bosom, veiled by silken braids,  
 Is sweet as hills that drop with myrrh,  
 While still the sly and tittering maids  
 Stand gazing after her.

Ah, Betty goes to meet her fate!  
 Bold Roger lurks by yonder stile.  
 She spies him, but alas! too late;  
 With him avails no scornful wile.  
 Now all her helpless pride he raids,  
 And traitor longings in her stir,  
 While o'er their shoulders men and maids  
 Make merry after her.

JAMES B. KENYON.



# THE FLIGHTS OF FRANÇOIS VICTOR ROUSSEAU

## ALICE OF CHALONS



SHALL never love again. I, François L'Anglois, of the Volunteer Aviation Corps of France. I have loved to my undoing, and I have come to the realization that of all vain things the vainest are the sparkling eyes and tempting lips of women. Listen to the story of my resolution.

Who in France does not know and has not been to Châlons? And who, having visited Châlons, has failed to drink a glass of wine at the pretty *auberge* of Monsieur Dupont, the hospitable landlord? Of the four and twenty men in my *aéroplane* division, nineteen had been to Châlons, and all the nineteen had drunk at the *auberge* and received the ravishing smiles of Alice Savard.

There are some smiles that make a fool of a man, but there are some that make one feel a better man for them, and of the latter sort were the smiles of Alice, the adopted daughter of the landlord. She was good, she was as beautiful as an angel, and we all worshiped her. When she smiled upon us, we were lifted up into ecstasy. When she smiled upon others, we hid our broken hearts and smiled also.

And after the Germans occupied Châlons? There came into our camp one day a fugitive from the little town.

They had not behaved so badly, the Boches, he said. Harshness—yes. Outrage? Perhaps. One heard stories that were never verified. But there had been rebellion and bloody repression in the street of the *auberge*, and Alice had disappeared. It was said that a Major Hecht had been fascinated by her. Anyway, she had gone, she whom we all loved, and her fate was unknown to any one.

We heard him to the end, and we ceased to grind our teeth, and grew cold with resolution. Such courage, such gayety and charm as hers, to meet an unknown end!

Then up rose old François Boulanger, the dean of our corps, sixty-five years of age and formerly a prosperous linen merchant, one of our most daring men.

"I have heard of this Major Hecht. He was in command at Châlons," he said. "I swear that I will never rest by day, or sleep soundly by night, until I have avenged her."

One by one our men rose up and swore. When it came to my turn, I swore, too, that I would never rest until I had avenged her.

Nor did any of us forget, but you know how little opportunity a soldier has for private vengeance. Still, we managed to acquire information and to

piece it together when we met. We learned that Hecht was with the German right. That faced our left, of course, to which we were attached. We learned later that he was with the Fifth Army Corps. Not all of us could be posted in the field facing this fraction of the enemy's forces, but we all applied. When we were told to select three men who should be transferred there, we drew lots, and I was one of the three.

Gradually, as the days went by, I drew nearer to my quarry. But then an incident occurred that at first distressed me. In brief, we volunteer air scouts were each supplied with bombs for the attack, and this required that each of us should have an assistant in his machine. My aid was a young fellow of about eighteen, a fresh-faced lad from rural Champagne, without a sign of manhood on his cheek. His name was Jean Vibart.

"You will teach this young fellow all you know," said General Paul Pau to me. "It is unfortunate that we have no more trained men for the volunteer corps. But if his ability is equal to his resolution, you will have no cause to regret his companionship."

I received him a little dubiously, for I did not want a raw country boy to aid me in the most difficult of all branches of warfare. Besides, his presence made my undertaking much more difficult, since I could not endanger his life upon a private mission, as I could my own. But on the first night, as we lay side by side in the little tent, he told me something that changed my views.

I had confessed my mission, and he gripped my hand and said that he had enlisted, although below the age, because he, too, had a sweetheart to find. At eighteen! The pathos of it moved me. But when he said that he wished to be face to face with Major Hecht, and

I heard his voice choked and broken, you can be sure we sealed our compact.

Afterward, when the bullets came buzzing about our ears, and I, casting my eyes back, saw him seated calmly behind me, tossing out bombs upon the enemy below as if he were playing ball at the *lycée*, I doubted my fortune in having such an aid no more.

And we never forgot our purpose. Slowly we wove the net about Hecht. We singled out his regiment and kept our best bomb for the major. Only we wished, if possible, to question him before we killed him.

We had flown over detachments of Prussians all one morning when the misfiring of my motor warned me that we were running out of essence, or, as the English say, petrol. I have heard that in America it is called benzine. I saw a village of a single street beneath me. I volplaned—for the motor had ceased—and fell into the midst of the population, which had already assembled to welcome us.

I saw a nice old curé, a butcher, a baker—also the baker's horse, which was crippled with rheumatism and therefore could not go to the war—a pretty girl, a countryman or two, neat little houses surrounded by rosebushes, and a pretty little church. In fact, we had alighted in a typical village of our beautiful France.

"Where are the enemy, monsieur?" I inquired of the curé after we had embraced each other.

"Yonder," he answered, pointing north and east. "And yonder," he continued, pointing south and west. "They may be here at any moment. It is not safe to remain five minutes. Do you require anything?"

"A little essence," I answered.

The curé smiled pitifully.

"There is not a single drop of essence anywhere in this department," he answered. "The government has taken it all, except what we hid. What we

hid the Germans have taken. But," he added, with an afterthought, "I have a keg of fine old brandy."

"Alas, Monsieur le Curé, *Suzette* is a temperance girl," I replied. "She will not work on brandy. So if you have no essence, you must hide her somewhere and give me and my companion shelter."

There happened to be a large barn filled with threshed straw, and my *Suzette* could just lie within its four walls. We covered her well, and knew that she was safe from detection, since the straw was useless to the invaders and they would not be likely to requisition it.

"And now, my son," said the old curé, "there is only one thing for you and your friend to do. You must put on civilian clothes and become laborers upon the farm of Madame Roy until Quentin is free from the invader. Fortunately you will pass for her two men who have gone to the war, and thus the invader, who has accurate knowledge of our affairs, will not become suspicious."

Madame Roy was a well-to-do widow of the village, occupying a neat little house at the end of the street, behind which the farm extended. The pretty girl whom I had seen was Mademoiselle Rose, her daughter. With them dwelled Philippe, the farm hand, and the only young man left behind in Quentin. He had been refused for the army because he could not march, being flat-footed from following the plow. And so, as I discovered, he was taking advantage of his opportunities to court his employer's daughter, and from the glances that I intercepted, he had evidently already succeeded in making a considerable impression upon the heart of Mademoiselle Rose.

I smiled in kindly tolerance at the young people's romance. Love, that passion of youth, must have its way. As for me, my heart, which had been

filled so recently with memories of my lost love, Josephine, now burned with the remembrances of the smiles of Alice.

"You see, *mon cher Vibart*," I explained, when we assembled in the little parlor, clothed *en paysan*, "when I was in Châlons, I was indifferent to her, because another love filled my heart. Yet I could not but observe that Mademoiselle Alice kept all her sweetest smiles for me. Each of the poor dupes in our mess thinks that it was he for whom she cared—yes, even fat old Boulanger, at sixty-five. Such is the credulity of age. But I knew that I had inspired in her a hopeless passion, and now that I am heart-free, I seek her to tell her that her love is returned. If she lives, I shall find her, and she will run into my arms and bury her face on my shoulder. And she will know that her devotion has at last met its reward."

"Ah, you are good! You are generous!" cried young Vibart impulsively.

"One does not forget that one is a Parisian," I answered.

I had resolved to avoid Mademoiselle Rose during the brief period of my disguise, in order that my Parisian *flair* and soldier's bearing might not inflict, against my wish, a wound that would take long in healing. But you can foresee what happened. Despite my resolutions, before the evening was ended, Mademoiselle Rose was at my side upon the parlor sofa, listening eagerly to my stories of war, while Monsieur Flatfoot sat in dudgeon at the other end of the room. Certainly it was not my intention to win the girl's affections. But as a great Frenchman—Victor Hugo, I think—has said, all is fair in love and war. If she preferred a man of the world and a soldier to the yokel Flatfoot, I could not but approve her judgment, and there was no need for Flatfoot to scowl at me as if I had been a Teuton.



Indeed, I could not refrain from imprinting a soldierly salute upon her cheek at my withdrawal, much to the surprise of little Jean, my companion.

"But is it thus, François, that one is faithful to one's love?" he protested.

"Why, my comrade," I answered lightly, "there is no harm in that, for Alice is there and Rose is here, and it would be a shame to abstain from saluting so fair a cheek because of any sentimental memories. And then you must remember that it was Alice who sought my love, not I hers."

"Ah, yes!" answered the little fellow. "I understand."

Flatfoot was still sullen the next morning, as we worked side by side in the potato patch, with Vibart at the wheelbarrow. And all the while I knew that, behind the lace curtains in the parlor window, Mademoiselle Rose's bright eyes were watching me. So well was I conscious of this that I was upon the point of returning to the house upon some pretext, in order to repeat my salutation of the preceding evening, when suddenly there arose in the street cries of "The Boches! The Boches!"

With my pitchfork over my shoulder, I joined the little crowd—the curé, the butcher, the baker, and the baker's horse. A small detachment, headed by a big uhlan upon a wild-looking steed, was entering Quentin. They marched grimly through the streets and pitched their tents not far from the bottom of Madame Roy's garden, we following them to watch the operation.

But their commander! A savage monster of a man he was, with long, yellow, drooping mustaches, prominent blue eyes, red face, and the build of a Hercules. I heard young Vibart utter a cry.

"Ah, *mon Dieu!* It is Hecht himself!" he exclaimed.

Then I recognized the man from the descriptions that I had sought eagerly.

I saw that the emotion had affected the lad profoundly. I drew him away.

"Courage, *mon petit Jean!*" I said. "We shall contrive a way of settling accounts with him."

When the tents were pitched, the uhlan came striding up to the house.

"Madame Roy?" he inquired, touching his helmet. "I shall have the honor of being your guest while we are in Quentin. Who are these young fellows?"

"Employees of mine," answered the brave old woman. "Natives of Quentin who could not go to the war on account of physical disability."

I saw young Vibart deadly white. I thought he trembled. At that moment, for the first time, I suspected his courage.

But the uhlan only nodded and entered the house, followed by an orderly carrying his suit case. So there we all were, with our quarry at our mercy and no way yet contrived in which we might deal with him.

In order not to embarrass our hostess, Vibart and I returned to our potato patch, from which we perceived a sergeant coming and going between the house and the camp. Flatfoot had disappeared.

Toward noon, just as we began to think anxiously of our dinner, a creaking sound attracted my attention. To my horror I saw, as I looked up, our biplane being trundled along the street by a couple of soldiers. At the same moment a sergeant entered the garden and advanced toward us.

Treachery! Before the house stood Major Hecht, Madame Roy, and Mademoiselle Rose, the women with frightened faces, while Flatfoot leered and scowled at us beside the officer. It was impossible to mistake the situation.

"Courage, Jean!" I whispered to my companion. "If it be possible, I shall save thee. If not, remember that thou art a soldier of France." And, flinging

down my pitchfork, I linked my arm in his and suffered the sergeant to conduct us to the uhlan.

He looked at me with menacing calmness.

"French spies?" he questioned laconically.

"Soldiers of the Volunteer Aviation Service," I answered, with pride.

"Ha! And your uniforms, *mes-sieurs*?"

"In the barn, *monsieur*."

"You know the laws of war. You shall be shot at sundown."

Madame Roy flung herself upon her knees before him.

"*Monsieur*, they are not spies," she protested. "They are what they claim to be, soldiers in the service of France."

"It is useless to plead, *madame*."

"It is Philippe has betrayed them. Ah, the miserable one!" she exclaimed, turning upon Monsieur Flatfoot, who shrank away and smiled uneasily. "He has betrayed us all."

"Yes, truly, *madame*," answered the officer. "For by the laws of war, if I applied them, your life would also be forfeited and your farm destroyed."

We were taken inside the little parlor and the door locked. Two sentries guarded us, one at the door, one pacing outside. And so the afternoon wore away. Sometimes I would hear the voice of the widow as she expostulated with the officer, sometimes the tearful tones of Mademoiselle Rose, and once or twice the pipe of the old curé. In the streets the populace, consisting of the butcher and the baker, gathered to watch us through the windows.

I tried to comfort Jean, who had quite broken down. He remained crouched in a corner, tearful, imploring. Poor boy, I could not blame him, knowing that, for the young, death is indeed bitter.

It must have been nearly sundown when at last the door was opened, and

the officer, accompanied by his sergeant, entered.

"You have half an hour," he said, addressing me coldly. "Half an hour in which to prepare for death—or to decide whether you will purchase your lives by informing me as to the disposition of the army of General Pau."

"You may spare yourself the trouble of inquiring further, *monsieur*," I answered.

"*Très bien*," he replied, quite in Parisian fashion, and turned to Vibart. "And you?" he asked.

He saw that the boy was overcome by the imminence of death.

"In return for a little information you shall go free," he said. "None will know of your betrayal, and, remember, the information you give me will be little more than we have already learned through our scouts. Your fellow spy will be where he can never inform against you."

The boy lifted his head.

"I am no traitor," he muttered.

"*Très bien!*" answered the major again. "Take these men to the place of execution, sergeant." He turned upon his heel.

I placed my arm about young Vibart's shoulders to support him as we went, not too fast, toward the brick wall of the outhouse, near which, standing with their rifles at the order, was a firing squad of six men. The pitying sergeant, once his officer had gone, halted and surreptitiously pulled a flask from his pocket.

He handed it to me, muttering a few words in his language which were incomprehensible to me. I took a few swallows of the brandy. It was not my own fate, but that of my companion that made me fear breaking down. And the honor of France demanded that we should face our fate like Frenchmen, and, for my part, like a Parisian.

Once before I had been in such a

situation. Then the approach of the English troops, coupled with a woman's wit, had saved me. There was no hope of this now. Our men were miles away, and on the defensive. Mechanically I saw the soldiers raise their rifles.

We were standing side by side in front of the wall. I took the boy's cold hand in mine.

"Vibart," I said, "remember to die gayly. A cheer for France—is it not so? A cheer and a defiance!"

But Vibart did not raise his head, which remained sunk on his breast. He seemed in an apathy, and as if in some dreadful picture I saw the uhlan approach his men, who had now formed in a line a dozen paces away. I looked at Jean, and, as I looked, a stunning realization came to me which explained much that had hitherto been enigmatic in his character.

I recoiled in horror, and I heard the sergeant shout at me. He thought I feared to die. But I did not care for his thoughts at that moment. I cried to Major Hecht. Something in my tones arrested the order he was about to give the men with the leveled rifles.

Jean Vibart, the boy, the brave companion of my adventures, was—a girl!

And I think I must have conveyed this information by some telepathic faculty, for I saw a change come over the major's face, and the order to fire, which he had had upon his lips, was never given. Instead, he ran toward us, and at that moment my comrade sank to the ground, profoundly unconscious. The strain had proved too great at the last moment.

"I did not know, monsieur!" I stammered, as together we raised the limp form from the ground.

But there was a new look upon the face of Major Hecht now. He seemed like a man overwhelmed with remorse and shame. Half turning, he dismissed the firing squad with a motion of his

hand, and, raising the girl's body in his arms, he pressed his lips to her cold ones with an abandonment of passion that I could not have imagined in a German. To be frank, it was quite French; it was more than French—it was Parisian.

And, as her eyes at length unclosed, there came to me, with stunning force, the understanding of that look upon the major's face. For I knew her now—Alice, Alice of Châlons, whom I had sought so long, who had been my comrade!

She had left Châlons to find her lover, the major in the invaders' army; and she had enlisted in our corps to further her search for him. Then, learning of our planned vengeance and not daring to reveal herself, for fear of being sent back from the lines, she had accompanied me, first to discover him, and then to prevent my vengeance.

But what thrills me with pride to-day is the remembrance that she was willing to die for France.

A wedding and a massacre go ill together, you say. That was the reason why Major Hecht set me free and bade me farewell, with a warm handshake, telling me to take my biplane and make my way into the French lines. But first I must witness the marriage ceremony performed by the old curé, and drive to the church with Madame Roy and mademoiselle in the carriage drawn by the baker's horse.

And afterward, as I stood there disconsolate, for all the words of friendship that Alice addressed to me, I realized that I had mistaken duty for love.

I had not loved her; it was the chivalrous nature of my quest that had endowed her, for me, with all the virtue and the beauty of an ancient heroine. Truly, my life held but one love at present—Mademoiselle Rose. And to her I paid my addresses.

"If the fortune of war should let

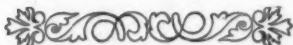
me survive these days of carnage, mademoiselle," I said, "seeing that Monsieur Flatfoot will doubtless not dare to show his face in Quentin again, it is my purpose to offer you a heart that has never truly known love until you captivated it."

To my amazement, she burst into tears and covered her face with her hands.

"But, mademoiselle," I protested, "I love you. Take courage. It is no terrible thing to be loved."

"Oh, monsieur," she sobbed, "I have been the wife of Philippe these two months past in secret, and nobody in Quentin knows."

That is why I said that love is the vainest of all earthly things, and that I shall never love again.



### THE WINDS

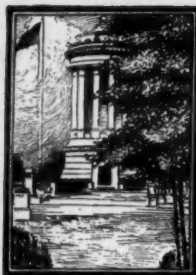
WEST wind, thou art the strong, young lover  
Flinging thyself upon Earth's trembling breast,  
Shouting with joy, and laughing down her struggles,  
Kissing her back to life and its unrest.

South wind, thou art the languorous passion,  
Swelling the buds of satisfied desire;  
Blowing through amorous lips, in wanton fashion,  
Upon the embers of love's flickering fire.

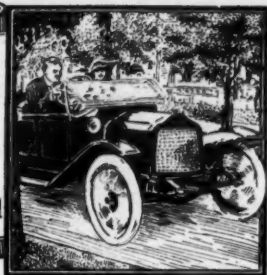
East wind, thou art the heart forsaken,  
The fruitless tears, the sobs of hopeless pain;  
Thou art the cold, dead dawn's dread separation,  
The loneliness—and the repentance vain.

North wind, thou art the brave endeavor  
To hide the sorrow 'neath the snows of pride;  
Thou freezest up love's fountain head, and ever  
Beneath thy chill Earth's dearest hopes have died.

MRS. DAVID S. BISPHAM.



## A Rose Colored Day of Mary Elking Braden



**I**N the life of every human being there are a few hectic days that stand out in bold relief against the dun background of the commonplace, like a spot of rouge on the powdered cheek of a court beauty. Such a day was July 19, 1913, in the life of Céleste DuBois. It began like all other days, with the cocks crowing in the country and the cars clanging in the cities.

About eight o'clock in the morning of July 19th, Céleste DuBois left a Broadway surface car and walked over to Fifth Avenue. She inserted a key in the lock of the door of the shop that Madame Louise had built up from a timorous intruder into the fashionable trade world into a smart, up-to-date dictator of modish headgear. She entered and drew up the shades.

For five years Céleste had raised and lowered these shades every morning and evening—marvelous shades of French lace and pastel-toned satin, with cords like the silken bonds of love. She raised them carefully and with fastidious slowness. To Céleste it was as the performance of a rite.

Most people—especially girls and women—hasten through their work that they may be at home. With Céleste, the contrary was the case. She hastened through her hours at home that she might be at work. "Home" was a noisy, narrow tenement flat with

a revolving clothesline in the rear that her mother worked ceaselessly by means of a pulley attached to the opposite fire escape. "Home" was the cheerless retreat of numerous brothers and sisters—little Pierre, who was growing up into a big boy and would soon be swallowed up in the dingy factories of lower Manhattan; little Félicie, who had injured her spine while performing on a friend's roller skates and now stumped the flinty sidewalks of Seventh Avenue on a little second-hand crutch; three other brothers and sisters, all perennially hungry and unkempt, eating endless slices of brown bread and treacle and shouting endlessly at each other the polyglot phrases of children whose nursery is the street and whose governess is neglect. "Home" was a place where her stepfather beat her mother on Saturday night with a garnishing of artistic profanity. In winter he drove a truck for the United Coal Companies. In summer he drove a truck for the United Ice Companies. In winter and summer he worked hopelessly and talked anarchism and was out of tune with the cheerful note of the times.

There had been a time when he had worked as a gardener in a great private estate up the Hudson. Those had been happy days. They had lived in a little wooden box of a house hidden in the bosky deeps back of the great mansion.



But when a gardener drinks rum and more rum until he falls among the flowers and snaps their fragile stems and crushes their fairy petals, the head gardener discharges him for destroying valuable and exotic plants. So they had come to the city, and Céleste had gone to work in the little shop of Madame Louise, which had then been a shy little shop.

She had worked so well that on July 19, 1913, she was earning twelve dollars a week as head trimmer. This sum went into the family exchequer, and thence, by divine right of the male parent, into many foaming beer cans and whisky carnivals. When Céleste heard an Italian tenor, suffering from acute nostalgia, singing "Home, Sweet Home" at the movies, she could never become tear-stained like so many around her. The line, "There's no place like home," was such a blatant cynicism that it left her snow cold.

But the shop of madame was a paradise that Céleste hastened to with a truly domestic ardor. It was a very exclusive little hat shop, catering only to that class of trade that bought in dozen lots and to suit every occasion, real and fancied. The large plate-glass show windows never contained more than one bonnet at a time, and the color of the soft velvet curtain behind the pedestal upholding whatever creation was on display changed, chameleon fashion, to harmonize with the reigning favorite of the milliner's art. Madame also believed in the commercial utility of a coat of arms. Ground into the glass panels of the doors and windows was the emblem of two griffins supporting a heavily beplumed hat, and beneath it the simple inscription: "*Le Chapeau.*"

The inside of the shop was pure Louis XV., and might have been mistaken for the small parlor of a French mondaine. No hats were visible. They were all on shelves behind the long wall

panels. There they waited, in chic silence and sachet-scented tissue wrappings, the advent of some haughty dame who would carelessly look them over and indicate her choice of some half dozen or so with a wave of her jeweled lorgnon.

Céleste gave the room a perfunctory dusting, picked up a Watteau shepherdess, and set it upright on a gilt cabinet. Then, without even glancing into the mirror at her fetching reflection, she lifted the heavy portière and passed back into the workroom. There was no one there. Madame did not get down until nine, and as it was a Saturday in the dull season, the other working girls had been given a holiday. A pile of hat frames and shapes lay on the large worktable, awaiting the deft fingers of Céleste. But for Céleste and the French furniture, the shop of Madame Louise would have fared ill. The furniture supplied the French atmosphere; Céleste supplied the French hats. Madame herself was Irish, and had been born in Newark, New Jersey.

To-day, Céleste picked up a white silk shape and began twisting it into a tricorn. Her fingers fell naturally into the making of tricorns. Her great-grandfather had been with Napoleon at Toulon; had sobbed and fought across the Russian wastes in the retreat from Moscow; had died at Waterloo. She loved to fashion soft velvets and shining silks into three-cornered shapes. It seemed to bring to life again the dead and gone ghosts of the Grand Army.

But this morning her thoughts were not on her beloved hats. The previous evening, the narrow house of DuBois had been rent by an internal disturbance that for a time had threatened to overturn its very foundations. In the face of clamor and abuse on the part of the entire family, Céleste had steadfastly refused to wed with one Felix Baumgartner, owner and proprietor

of the Baumgartner Delicatessen on Fourth Avenue. The reason for the refusal could be traced to no more tangible cause than an ideal.

Felix was a solid and substantial citizen of forty-five, with a respectable-looking bald head and a cast-iron code of morals. For two years he had trailed perspiring after Céleste, and in the face of all discouragements, never losing the scent, had finally put his trusty gun to his shoulder and striven to bag his quarry. But the quarry had refused to be bagged and had balked at explanations. The truth was that there was no explanation, or, at least, no explanation that Céleste's family could have appreciated. You can't expect a family without ideals of any sort to sympathize with you when you refuse a good home with a good man like Felix Baumgartner, because he is poky and fat and thinks a one-piece calico dress and a white apron the proper uniform for a wife.

Not but that he also had his good points. He paid his debts almost before he contracted them, and was as honest as a cash register. He would have made a faithful husband and a fairly prosperous one, but unfortunately he was neither handsome, romantic, nor possessed of the facile tongue that covers so many faults with a Frenchwoman. So Céleste's stepfather had seen his pet dream of a son-in-law who could lend him money shattered by a single "no" from Céleste.

But he had not seen his dream shattered without protest. That was not his way. Even now Céleste's fingers trembled as she threaded her needle. She could hear the angry voice of her stepfather raised in remonstrance, and the piteous crying of her mother at her continued refusal. But for her twelve dollars per week, she would have been thrown bodily into the street, but twelve dollars is twelve dollars, and her stepfather's credit was very poor.

These thoughts were broken off by the honk and whir of a motor outside and the breezy advent of madame. Customers began dropping in. Long gilt mirrors hung on rollers were whisked from against the walls and placed in front of them. Hats were miraculously spirited from nowhere. Yellow bills changed hands. Madame, tapping the cash register on her desk, handed change to her customers with the air of a czar conferring a priceless decoration on a humble scientist and waived her visitors out into the street. The regular business of the day was now in full swing. Madame's carefully repressed tones were constantly rising and falling in the front parlor. At the worktable Céleste tacked and sewed and basted.

The scene of last evening was seared on her brain like a monstrous set piece of fireworks that refused to expire into darkness. Céleste was honest with herself. She told herself that she could not marry Felix Baumgartner because she was in love with a memory. Five years ago she had played and romped on the golf links and tennis courts of the great Fleet estate with its heir—young Gordon Fleet. Then they had moved to the city, and she had never seen him again. He had doubtless forgotten her very existence, but she watched for his name in the social and financial columns of the daily papers, and wove many dreams around the memory of their brief acquaintance. It was these dreams that made Felix Baumgartner a marital impossibility.

Toward noon, Céleste received a telephone call from her friend, Alfreda Shipley, who was the window decorator and chief saleslady in the Grecian Palace Candy Store across the street.

"A gink," announced Alfreda, without preface, "a gink I know has asked me to go to lunch with him, and as you and me had a date to eat together, I told him he had invited two. We'll

come over for you at one p. x. Have your nose powdered, and try and sneak out one of madame's picture hats to wear for an hour, can't you? He sells for the Vassar Chocolate Company, and he knows class when he sees it, bullieve me! So brush up your well-worn alpaca, honey, and work your eyes like Anna Held. Good-by! I'm busy now. At one p. x."

Promptly at one o'clock Alfreda, in a pongee suit, with a cerise sash tied around her hips and a panama hat, towed a rather smartly garbed drummer to the door of madame's hat shop. They were met on the threshold by Céleste. The salesman's quick eye noted her piquant face, her dead-leaf-brown hair, her browner eyes, her full red lips, the dimple in the southeast corner of her mouth. Her plain gray suit clung to her petite figure like a glove. The cobwebby veil over the small sailor hat swam before his eyes like a gray mist. Alfreda grinned inwardly as she noted his subjection.

"Céleste, this is Mr. Lucius Kemp; Mr. Kemp, Miss DuBois. He's going to take us to a tea room he's rustled up somewhere just off the avenoo, where they serve dinner from twelve to two. A real dinner, not a *salade de grass* and a cup of *cube bouillon*."

Mr. Kemp made a desperate effort to corral his scattered wits and meet the social exigency.

"Indeed, I know you girls will not be disappointed," he finally responded gallantly. "It's a real little gem of a place, and you can get eats there like you find in the old farmhouse at Thanksgiving."

Céleste smiled and murmured her appreciation of his kindness. Alfreda snapped up her rosy parasol and handed it to him, with a grimace.

"I'm going to do two windows in Vassar Chocolates for Mr. Kemp this week," she announced, "so of course he thinks he has to play host to-day."

Céleste had long ago learned that Alfreda's conversation consisted solely of what was on her mind at the time, so she was not much surprised at this somewhat commercial version of Mr. Kemp's hospitality. Mr. Kemp himself did not seem to think it at all out of order.

They found that their host had not exaggerated the possibilities of The Cozy Tea Room on Forty-second Street. Mr. Kemp ordered a real dinner of real food. The brown fried chicken, the sweet potatoes à la Maryland, the country-gentlemen corn, and the peach ice cream tasted like delicious ambrosia to Céleste, who habitually lunched and dined lightly, though not from gastronomic preference. With the ambrosia, they had nectar in the form of sherry lemonade in tall glasses.

Under the stimulating effect of the food and the face of Céleste, Mr. Kemp became pleasantly loquacious. He related some of his more mellow triumphs on the road. He expatiated on the growing demand for Vassar Chocolates. He told how he had snatched carloads—yes, carloads—of orders from under the noses of angry competitors. Céleste listened in wide-eyed absorption. She drank in his exploits in the realm of the near-lawless as his brother's children drank in the fairy stories of Hans and Gretchen in the enchanted forest. If he was a new type to her, she was no less so to him. His feminine friends were wont to yawn brazenly in the middle of his most convincing climaxes, and, while rubbing their faces with pink chamois skins, rudely exclaim: "Gawd, kiddo, whatcha givin' us?"

Until to-day he had not been aware that any other type of femininity existed. The thought of what he had been missing all his life caused his stomach to turn over in a seasick fashion. He became more seasick as the

time for parting drew near. At last Alfreda arose in no uncertain fashion.

"I gotta go, Mr. Kemp," she said. "Joe will have a detective out after me if I don't show up in ten minutes." Joe was the proprietor of the Grecian Candy Palace and the latest conquest of the indefatigable Miss Shipley.

Mr. Kemp had to hurry to an appointment also.

"You know how it is," he kept repeating. "I made a date to meet the vice president of the V. C. Co. at two-thirty. I'm due at the Grand Central Station now, because he wired me he would be down on the two-twenty-eight express from Albany. If it was anybody else, I would never show up, but you know how it is when it's the vice president."

"Goo'-by, Mr. Kemp," cooed Alfreda, with a ravishing smile. "I'll fix them windows up so everybody in town will be asking for Vassar Chocolates. Drop in and see me later."

"Good-by, Mr. Kemp," smiled Céleste. "The lunch was delicious, and I hope we meet again."

Mr. Kemp held Céleste's hand so long that Alfreda became visibly nervous, and said so many good-bys that he nearly missed his appointment.

"How do you like him?" inquired Alfreda, as the two girls turned north on Fifth Avenue.

"He is very kind—and entertaining," added Céleste, as an afterthought. "He seems to be a great salesman."

"Which means that you don't care if the train from Albany jumps off the track and lands on his neck," translated Miss Shipley. "Say, Céleste, look here, what's the matter with you, anyway? I can't make you out. You won't go out with Felix Baumgartner to Coney, and you turn up your nose at Mr. Kemp—although Joe told me this morning that he was a chap any girl might be glad to get a line on. He doesn't smoke or drink, and he told me himself that

he had such rotten luck that if he put ten dollars on a pony, it would fall down on the home stretch and break three legs. He don't even play poker. What's the matter with you, Céleste? Are you in love with some fellow out West? I never see you with any one here, but you turn down everything I frame up, although you can see that the fellows are just crazy to go with you. I wanted to fix it up for Mr. Kemp to take us to the motor-cycle races at Brighton, but I was afraid to spring it for fear you'd refuse. Here's the candy shop. I'll bet Joe is waiting for me with a popgun. What's the word, Céleste? Are you a man-hater or just plain snippy?"

Céleste looked across the street at the closed blinds of Madame Louise's fascinating shop. All at once the avenue seemed hot and dusty and crowded. She gazed levelly at Alfreda and answered tonelessly:

"I guess I'm just 'snippy,' Alfreda. I quit Felix for good last night, and somehow, Alfreda, I don't seem to take the proper interest in people. Maybe it's because things have been going so badly at home. The ice company is out on a strike because the officials won't recognize the union and take on the men they let out last March, and mother has been having the rheumatism, and Félicie has fallen and hurt her back again. It isn't that so much, though," she added truthfully. "It's only that I can't find any one that just suits me, I guess."

"Come in and try one of Joe's banana specials," consoled Alfreda gently.

"No, I'm going for a walk in the park," replied Céleste. "Madame gave me the afternoon off, and I want to rest quietly a little while before I go back home."

She swung out to the right of the sidewalk and mingled with the gayly garbed summer crowd. The façades of the buildings seemed to radiate shim-

mering waves. The sun's almost vertical rays beat down on the white sidewalk, and the human insects crawling over them, with nauseating ardor. Subconsciously Céleste resented the deadening heat that wrapped the afternoon in a close blanket of red flannel. The offer of the "banana special" floated before her eyes like a mirage of water in a dusty desert. She was half tempted to go back and accept Alfreda's invitation, but the green lure of Central Park held her to her first intention.

She passed the bronze statue at the southern entrance and pressed on, into the heavenly embrace of trees and grass. She walked on and on, sometimes on the path, sometimes on the grass, seeking a bench where she could be alone. But the benches were all occupied. Park idlers, children chasing the squirrels, white-aproned and capped nurses, strolling lovers in linen and blue serge, tired office men reading the last edition, young girls giggling over candy boxes and lavender-tinted notes—the place was full.

Finally at a bend in the path, she came upon an unoccupied bench. She appropriated it with a sigh of thankfulness, throwing her hat on the seat and hanging her jacket over the back. It was not a very quiet place, but it was at least temporarily deserted. A winding vehicle path flowed through the park, east and west, just below her feet. Autos whizzed by every few minutes. She watched them with the semi-fascination of utter idleness. They came into view around the bend suddenly and disappeared around the curve of the road beyond as if effaced by a monstrous blotter. They came almost regularly: a blue car—a red car; a blue car—a gray car; a blue car—a yellow car. The world was speed mad.

She put her elbow on the back of the bench and leaned her cheek in her hand. The fancy came to her that she was the sole spectator at a great motor

race. This pageant had been arranged solely for her benefit. The machines appeared and disappeared steadily: a blue car—a red car; a blue car—a gray car; a blue car— Then a long, rakish, bottle-green car swung into view. It ran slowly as if the chauffeur were having engine trouble. In the tonneau sat a single person—a tall, blond young man, his hat on the leather seat beside him. His alert gaze fastened on Céleste.

She, in her astonishment, half rose from the bench and spoke his name; and on high Olympus the son of Venus smiled and, turning over, composed himself for a long nap.

As the car rolled by, the rear occupant smiled and bowed low. Then the curve in the drive came out and claimed him.

Céleste's color rose high. Her heart beat like a caged creature. She had seen Gorden Fleet, and he had recognized her—had spoken to her. She felt like jumping up and dancing on the greensward. The world was a garden—life was sweet—the day was cool—the air was balmy. She was so happy that the rosy son of Venus opened one eye and decided to make her still happier. The curve in the drive relented, and presented to Céleste's astonished vision the picture of Gorden Fleet walking toward her, smiling, his hat in his hand. The sun through the leaves made patches of light on his fair hair. He came on steadily, the unwavering smile on his lips. He came straight up to the bench and took Céleste's small hand in his strong, white one.

"Little Céleste," he murmured teasingly, "how you have grown! Grown into a skirt that touches your little pink toes and the manner of a duchess. How do I know they are pink toes, Céleste? Everybody's are, Céleste."

Céleste was vexatiously aware that she was too excited to answer at once. She remembered the stammerings of



Mr. Kemp and felt sorry that she had laughed at him. Motioning to the bench, she invited Fleet to be seated.

"It's good to see you again, Céleste," he went on, as he deposited himself in one corner of the bench. "Fleetwood has gone entirely to pot since you left."

"Fleetwood could never be other than beautiful," interposed Céleste shyly.

Her companion laughed.

"Fleetwood is a howling wilderness these days, inhabited by ravens who croak of awful dooms and hooting owls and bats. In short, Fleetwood has become such a bore that I have opened the house on the avenue, and expect to pass a few years there, at least, in peace."

He produced a gold-and-jeweled cigarette case and asked her permission to smoke.

"My chauffeur—who, by the way, doesn't know enough to tell the number on his own car—is tinkering with the engine up the drive, a short distance. There's not a thing the matter with the engine, Céleste, not a thing in the world! You know me well enough to understand that I wouldn't ride behind a bum engine. It's that chauffeur. He ought to be pitching the golden hay and seeking eggs on some alfalfa ranch out West, instead of trying to pose as a motor expert."

Céleste smiled. Here was the same autocratic, amusing boy she had known five years ago, grown into a man. She could have embraced his immaculate gray knees and kissed the white gardenia in his buttonhole.

He flicked the ash from his cigarette. In the mid-afternoon light his hair gleamed like yellow corn. His blue eyes shone coldly blue except when they were turned on her, when they melted into a liquid essence—a more friendly azure.

"What do you do with yourself these days, Céleste?" he inquired.

With many pauses and promptings, she told him of her work with madame; of her life at home; of the friends she had made since leaving Fleetwood; of the gradually increasing excesses of her stepfather. A distressed look came into young Fleet's eyes at the mention of her stepfather. He started to question her more closely, but his chauffeur appeared at the curve in the drive, signaling with a monkey wrench that the machine was ready. When he saw how his master was engaged, he stopped suddenly, as if at a loss how to proceed.

"I'll be there in a minute, Griggs. Go back to the car," directed Fleet shortly. The chauffeur slowly retreated. "He's an old woman," Fleet assured Céleste. "Say, Céleste, how about a spin to-night out Yonkers way, if you aren't engaged? I'll bring a machine and meet you anywhere you say. I'll see you safely home, too. Will you go?"

Will a famished beggar refuse a porterhouse steak? She could go. She had the key of madame's shop, and she would meet him there at eight-thirty. They would go for a drive out by the Hudson. He would come alone, and drive the car himself. He left her with a courtly bow. At the turn in the drive he turned also and waved his hand boyishly. Céleste responded by blowing him the faintest and airiest of kisses. He applauded delightedly and waved his hat.

You will not blame Céleste! Of course it is laid down in the "Rules for Working Girls" that social intercourse with people financially superior is the crime paramount. But when one has traveled beside a Felix Baumgartner for two years, seeking what joy there may be in the earth, under the inverted bowl of the sky; when one has trimmed exquisite hats for five years to adorn more wealthy sisters of the same clay; when one has no beautiful thing in one's home, or in one's

life; when one has no real friend who understands one's need, but only sordid reality for a playfellow and querulous care for a bedfellow, one is very likely to light the fire with the "Rules for Working Girls" and go philandering with the first full-grown opportunity that presents itself. Céleste was only human, and it is not human to cast down your eyes and murmur refusals when a man you have dreamed about and refused other men for because he is alive asks you to take a drive with him along the most beautiful stream in the world, under a full-blown summer sky.

Something of this passed through Céleste's mind as she pinned on her hat and gathered up her jacket preparatory to leaving the park. She walked briskly down the path to the southern entrance, passed the big bronze statue, and swung out into the traffic on the downtown side.

As she walked, she planned. Her first thought was the feminine one of adornment. She took out the little green purse that contained her weekly wage and extracted five dollars. She would buy a few things to wear to-night. Next week she could easily get along without luncheons and car fares. Perhaps Alfreda would offer her malted-milk shakes. If she gave her stepfather seven dollars, he would be satisfied. She would tell him she needed a pair of shoes. In a little shop off the avenue she turned in and bought a pair of white canvas pumps and a rather expensive pair of silk hose. Also a pair of short white silk gloves with black stitching. She gave the five dollars to the salesgirl and walked out, with her package under her arm. She felt pleasantly exhilarated. The spending of the new five-dollar note had given her all the sensations of an adventure.

The bells were chiming the hour of six. She went into a telephone booth

and, after much trouble, succeeded in getting her brother Pierre on the line and explaining that she would not be home before ten, as Joe and Alfreda had asked her to go to Coney—which was the truth, Céleste reflected.

Next she hurried down to tell Alfreda the news. Alfreda was just pinning on the panama, preparatory to taking the elevated for home.

"How's all the bunch up in Central Park?" she chirped out, as she caught sight of Céleste.

Céleste told her the news. Alfreda's eyes grew big and her arms jerked down from the hat-pinning business as if she were operated by internal wires and pulleys.

"Gorden Fleet, the millionaire?" she demanded breathlessly. "Upon my soul, Céleste, you're in luck! Say, Joe has asked me to go to Coney to-night, but if you could get Gorden on the phone and have him bring along one of his friends for me, I could fix it to go with you."

Céleste explained the impossibility of such chicanery. Miss Shipley wilted, but revived under the stimulation of future promises.

"Have a ripping good time, Céleste," she admonished. "Don't worry about what your folks will say. If I see your brother or sister at Coney, I'll tell them that you were with us until a minute ago, and that you just went through the Chinese laundry with my cousin from Ithaca. Kemp was in a while ago. He wanted to make a date with you, through me, to go to Far Rockaway to-morrow or run over to Atlantic City for the day, but I told him that, as your booking agent, I could assure him your dates were all filled for a year. If I had known it sooner, I could have told him you were going out with Gorden Fleet. However, Monday is another day, and he'll be here as sure as I'm not pigeon-toed. Goo'-by. I gotta go. Ma has a fit if the stuff gets cold. Goo'-by."

I hope you have a swell time. Drop in Monday morning and tell me all about it."

Céleste smiled and waved at Alfreda's rapidly retreating figure. There was one thing about Alfreda—she wasn't jealous and she didn't throw cold water on a thing, even if it wasn't exactly *comme il faut*. Yes, Alfreda was "a good fellow," as they said on Broadway.

Céleste went into a white-tiled dairy lunch and ordered a plate of spaghetti and a bottle of milk. She had heard that spaghetti was very nourishing. It was fortunate that Mr. Kemp had bought her such a good dinner at noon.

Her rather pasty repast concluded, she hastened to madame's. The lights were coming out in the City of Adventure. Céleste hugged her precious package. She was to engage in her first hazard with fortune. She opened the door at madame's and locked it behind her. The familiar aspect of the place reassured her. She went into a back room that was fitted up as a lavatory and washed her face and hands. She stripped off her hot gray suède shoes and her stockings and bathed her feet. She smiled as she sloshed the water between her toes. Yes, they were pink.

She drew on the long white silk hose and stuck her little feet into the cool canvas pumps. She took down her hair and combed it and put it up in the simple fashion of the day. She brushed her gray suit with vigorous thoroughness. From a near-by drug store she procured a nickel's worth of chloroform and removed a spot on the right lapel. She wriggled back into her white crêpe blouse with the smart-looking silk buttons. She put on the gray skirt, thanking Heaven she had made it with a drape on the side, instead of plain, as she had at first intended. She donned the jacket, glad that she had taken it to a man tailor to be fitted.

She dropped her gray sailor into a box under the worktable, and for the first time in her life appropriated one of madame's hats for an evening. Without hesitation, and straight as a homing bird goes to its nest, she touched the secret spring that released panel seven, in the front parlor. Without hesitation again, she selected a hat wrapped in tissue paper from shelf four. She removed the covering and threw it into a wastepaper basket. The hat she pinned on her low coiffure. It was a white motor bonnet, with a garland of the finest handmade roses around the crown, and a veil draped down the back as filmy as a mist and as colorful as a rainbow shining through vapor. She drew on the white gloves, put an additional dab of powder on her nose, and sat down to await the advent of Gorden Fleet in his magic coach.

At eight-twenty-nine Gorden Fleet, in a linen coat and motor cap, whizzed up to the door of madame's shop, killed the engine, and jumped out.

"Prompt as a bridal party," he called out to Céleste, who was standing in the doorway. He crossed the pavement and came up to her. "Invite me inside so I can see where you work all day, Céleste," he coaxed.

Céleste smilingly complied.

"Where are the hats? I thought you said it was a hat shop!" he exclaimed surprisedly, gazing around the Louis XV. parlor.

Céleste indicated the wall panels.

"We have to keep them concealed, in order to keep them fresh and pretty," she explained.

"I'll bet you have to have a card-index system to find a certain bonnet," he surmised, as she opened one of the panels and showed him the rows of wrapped headgear. "Well, come on, Céleste, before Madame Louise appears and has us pinched for fixture robbers. You couldn't get hold of much less in here unless you knew the combination."

They went outside and got in the car. Fleet cranked automatically, and they were off like a flash. The machine ran like a ribbon, silently, smoothly, every part tuned up so perfectly that the ensemble was a work of art.

"In France," Céleste told him, with shining eyes, "they know how to build motor cars."

Fleet smiled appreciatively and struck out in the direction of Riverside Drive. It seemed perfectly natural to Céleste to be driving with him. He was frank and unaffected and always perfectly at ease. He inspired her with the peace of a thousand churches.

They drove along the length of Central Park and out by the Hudson. Over the city the million arc lights of Manhattan twinkled—the giant fireflies of science. From the water side came the boom of a signaling harbor boat. Phantom tugs drifted down the stream, with occasional shrill whistlings. A gauzy shred of fog clung close to the Palisades. It was a night for trysts and whispered vows and a fullness of love beyond desire. And after the sulphuric heat and the sun scars of the day, the city drew a long breath and, bathed and curled, went forth to joust with love in many forms. Some pranced all night with a burning brand plucked from the altar of lust; some idled away the evening's routine with home-keeping hearts; some sought new faces, and some old; some renewed old vows, and some pressed through the inchoate stages of acquaintance and plighted new ones.

They flew through the night as if pursued by Tam o' Shanter's ghosts. They flew so literally that a cop on a motor cycle gave chase. He caught up with them, and Fleet stopped the car. The speedometer was set on the policeman's wheel at sixty miles an hour.

"You can come with me now to the station, my friend," announced the

minion of the law. Fleet swallowed his chagrin and a harsh word. He was afraid to offer the man any money lest he be taken up on the two counts of speeding and bribing an officer.

"These fellows get a bonus for every arrest they make, and they're very chary about taking graft from a total stranger," he reflected.

He finally decided to take a chance, however. He extracted a card and, folding a yellow-backed bill under it, handed it to the officer. The policeman took it and grinned, as he read the name and address.

"I see you are strangers in the city," he said. "No doubt you don't know that the laws in this State prohibit sixty miles an hour on public highways within the city limits. We don't like to be too hard on strangers, so I'll let you off this time."

Fleet handed him a cigar and started the car. He shook the cop with a feeling of exhilaration.

"If he had known, me better, he would have taken me to the station, if for no other reason than to have me in safe-keeping," he chuckled. A cryptic remark that Céleste did not trouble to analyze. To Céleste, as to some millions of people in the four boroughs, it was an axiom that a policeman would steal the iron dogs off the lawn of an orphanage and sell them for junk. So far as she was concerned, the incident ended with the presentation of the yellow bill. But Fleet kept a wary eye out for uniforms thereafter. He realized that most of the police force were aware that he possessed "the speed bug."

The engine purred off refreshing miles. Gorden, busy with the wheel, did not talk much. Céleste was content to watch the stars and revel in the nearness of his presence. After a while the machine began running queerly. Fleet stopped the car and consulted the essence tank.

"No juice, Céleste," he announced. "That's one on me. Even my Swede of a chauffeur wouldn't try to run a car without essence." He debated silently a minute. "There's enough in the tank to get us out to the Green Tree Inn—a road house about a quarter of a mile from here. We'll run down there and have her filled up and get a little drink."

In the Green Tree Inn they found a quiet table on the veranda, with a window open toward the orchestra. Céleste demurred at drinking the wine Fleet ordered, so the waiter brought her a lemon seltzer. Inside, a couple of professionals and a fast-looking bunch of diners in riding habits were dancing the bear. When their movements became too suggestive, the music would stop for a minute or two. Céleste watched their gyrations with the wide-eyed absorption of the uninitiated. Fleet smoked and watched Céleste. Finally she sighed softly and turned to him.

"They seem so jolly and happy," she whispered enviously.

"They *are* happy," said Fleet; "as happy as I am—as happy as a mother is to see a little white casket go out the front door! It's a happy world, Céleste. But the happiest are those like you, who have never deliberately sought for happiness."

Céleste twisted in her seat. "All the same, it must be nice to have clothes and motors and jewels like the people have who are here to-night. You don't understand because you have always had them."

Fleet smiled bitterly. "There are better things than clothes and motors and jewels, Céleste. Peace of mind and virtue, for instance."

Céleste made a little *moue*. "And poverty and honest toil," she mimicked.

Fleet looked at her queerly.

"You don't like those things, Céleste, do you?" he questioned gravely.

"Céleste, will you answer me one question?" She nodded affirmatively. "Your appearance forces me to be impertinent. Is there any man in this woman-mad city who has paid for any of those clothes you are wearing?"

Céleste recoiled from the suggestion. Then she slowly shook her head and leaned toward him.

"There is no man who cares for me or for whom I care," she said gently.

"That suit you have on—it has the cut and finish of the finest models. The lining is of the best quality, even," he persisted.

Céleste smiled.

"I made the skirt myself from a model in the window of an importer's shop on Fifth Avenue. The jacket was fitted by a tailor. The lining was given to me Christmas by my friend, Alfreda Shipley. She meant me to use it for a waist."

"Your motor bonnet——" he pursued relentlessly.

"It was loaned me—that is, I borrowed it from madame's stock." She blushed slightly. "My gloves and shoes I bought to-day after seeing you. It will mean fewer luncheons next week," she finished softly.

He had to be satisfied on that subject. He questioned her still more closely. She answered everything with scrupulous exactness.

Relentlessly he stripped bare all her pitiable makeshifts for appearance, and left the scarecrow of poverty flapping its rags in consternation. She would no more have dreamed of telling him an untruth than she would have planned to have stolen his watch. He seemed pleased beyond expression at the replies she gave. He reveled in the knowledge that she was telling him the unvarnished truth. It was an intellectual orgy to him to draw her out, to know that at his command she doffed soft pride and feminine subterfuge. He was engaged in the oldest business in



the world, one in which every man has engaged since time began—he was trying to disentangle a woman's soul from its wrappings of sly tricks and cold evasions, that he might look upon it, as a naked entity, until he was drunk with the satiety of conquest.

The waiter filled up a glass with champagne, and when he had gone, Fleet leaned over and touched Céleste's hand, which lay among the glasses.

"You win, Céleste," he whispered softly. "You may have any jewel in the world—though there is none to match your eyes. You may have any gown in the world or a million gowns. And you may have a motor for every day in the year."

Céleste shrank back in her wicker chair at the unexpectedness of this flank movement.

The "Rules for Working Girls" were right, then. But from Gorden Fleet it was a stinging thrust. Why did men always strike for that seam in the armor? And Gorden Fleet—the man she had loved in secret for five years—begging her to barter her only birthright of virtue for a tainted mess of pottage! Oh, it was cruel! But it was to be expected, of course. Men were all like that. She dragged the mantle of charity quickly over his feet of clay.

"What's the matter, Céleste?" he interrupted her train of thought sharply. "You are not misunderstanding me? I want you to be my wife."

The words revived her like a dash of cold water in the face. She got up on her feet and laughed a little.

"Your wife? Me? No, Gorden," she stammered.

He seized her like a recovered treasure and crushed her voraciously in his arms.

"Yes—you, Céleste." He kissed her scarlet mouth and the bewitching dimple in its corner. "Why not? I love you. If you'll have me, I'll brace

up and be a good sort—a decent husband, Céleste."

She received his caresses as a thirsty flower drinks up water. In the trees at the side of the inn a million nightingales came out and sang to her.

"Will you marry me, Céleste?" he entreated in her small ear.

"Gorden, I have tried, but I have never been able to bring myself to marry any one else," she acknowledged.

He laughed aloud in ecstasy. Then and there he planned the honeymoon.

"We'll go to Paris first," he told her, "and then to Cannes and Nice and Rome and Vienna."

He would make love to her in every city of the world. They must hurry or there would not be time enough for all they had to do. They had already wasted too much time.

Céleste held her breath, starry-eyed. It was like some promise of a visit to fairyland to her enchanted imagination.

Fleet kissed her dewy mouth again and again. To him Vienna was an old story; Paris was filed away in his mind with other things that had once allured and held out golden promises that time and acquaintance with them had failed to fulfill. But to his sated senses and jaded tastes, Céleste brought a heavenly touch of cool refreshment. It was as if he had come upon a sparkling spring of sweet water when his soul was weary with a deathly sickness and his feet were heavy with toiling through deserts and amid the burned-up places of the earth.

"Sweet little Céleste!" he murmured. "What if I had missed you?"

"Let's not indulge in nightmares, when we can dream happy dreams," begged Céleste, shuddering slightly as she remembered the years that she had wasted with Felix Baumgartner.

"There's one thing more, Céleste, dear. I hate to mention it, but what is the use of deceit, as the burglar said who picked the lock at noonday."

Céleste's heart jumped a hurdle and then stopped, as if it never expected to do another beat. She looked up into his ardent eyes. They glowed with a lambent flame that shriveled up the doubt and fear that for a moment had clutched at her heart.

"You see, Céleste—it's this way. My family sort of have their stubborn heads set on disposing of my valuable heart and hand to a lady of their choice, and they would kick up a frightful row if they knew some one had intervened to spoil their well-laid plans. So I suggest that we get married at once to prevent any fuss. I'll come around for you early Monday morning in the car. You have all your stuff packed. Don't take much, though, as we can buy anything you need before we sail. Then, after the ring is on, we'll tell the family, and not a minute before. How about it, Céleste? Is it a good plan or not?"

To Céleste it seemed that there might be more flaws in the multiplication table than in such a plan.

"It's all settled then," cried Fleet, jumping up and kissing her. "I'll be after you at nine o'clock Monday morning. Then to the Little Church Around the Corner, and to show you all of Europe, Asia, and Australia."

After a while, Céleste drank a little of the wine, in celebration of the event. Then Fleet sent for the machine. While the car was being brought around to the porte-cochère, Fleet insisted on drinking a toast to Céleste's eyelashes and one to her ear.

The attendant drove their machine around to the side entrance, and they got in.

A night wind blew out from the land. From the sea a fog blew in, with the clothes-penetrating, flesh-piercing damp of a mist that has clasped icebergs in its embrace. Fleet wrapped Céleste in a motor coat that looked like a prairie fire and smelled like a tepee in mid-

winter. It might have been a blanket of orchids for all Céleste knew. The stars leaning earthward and the argent moon—blasé and sated with lovers' vows—were witnesses to the promises each made the other.

Céleste climbed the five flights of narrow stairs with extreme caution. The air was pregnant with a thousand washings and a thousand dinners—in which cabbage figured as the *pièce de résistance*. She opened the door leading into the bare rooms she called "home" with extreme care. She had no desire to awaken her father from his Saturday evening slumbers. His greeting on such an occasion as the present one would be more terror-inspiring than the lusty war exhortations of Agamemnon.

In her room, she undressed without waking the two younger children, who shared her bed. The bed had never seemed soft before. To-night it was eiderdown and flower petals.

For a long time she lay awake, staring, wide-eyed, into the darkness. She lived again the moments when Gordon's kisses had fallen on her lips. She planned what they would do for her family with his unlimited finances. Pierre should go to school; Félicie should have an expert operate upon her spine; her mother should have leisure, opportunity, rest in which to enjoy opportunities; the younger children should be sent to boarding schools. When one has blarneyed the wolf for years, it is relaxing to lie down in the doorway and frankly make faces at it.

Her father did not figure very conspicuously in her plans. It is not hard to disregard the rights of an individual whom everybody describes by such specific epithets as "drunkard" and "degenerate."

The rosy-fingered dawn stole into her room and gilded the dingy walls with frolicsome frescoes. The world outside stirred sleepily. Céleste reluctantly

gave over her thoughts of Gorden Fleet and their future life together and fell into an untroubled sleep.

Monday morning—and nine o'clock—came, laughing ghoulishly and dragging a million weary clerks, laborers, and office men back to the rack of affairs.

At nine o'clock Céleste was ready and—with packed handgrip—waiting for Gorden to appear.

She waited anxiously. In the bright, cynical sunshine of Monday morning, the events of Saturday night seemed to fade into the unreality of a dream. Again she was Céleste DuBois, head trimmer for Louise of Fifth Avenue, and Gorden Fleet was a bondholder and aristocrat—as far removed from her social sphere as the opposite ends of interstellar space. In the broad daylight her claims on Gorden Fleet faded into the flimsiest of presumptions.

Nervously she watched the hands of the clock. It was now nine-thirty, and still he had not come. A great fear gathered in her eyes and dulled them with the agony of hope deferred.

Ten o'clock came, and ten-thirty.

Only one thought brought her relief—that she had not confided her plans to her family. She had simply told them that madame had given her the day off. The little grip she had packed at night and put behind the bed.

At eleven o'clock she put on her hat and took the elevated uptown. She felt that she would die if she remained another moment waiting at the window for a green motor car that did not come.

She hunted up Alfreda at the Grecian Palace Candy Store. Alfreda greeted her with a question—a peculiar question for Alfreda.

"Have you seen the morning papers?" she demanded.

"No," replied Céleste, trying to smile

naturally. "Why? Have the Japs invaded New York?"

Alfreda chewed gum vigorously.

"Pshaw!" she said disappointedly. "I told Joe I bet you could tell us all about it."

"About what, Alfreda?" queried Céleste. "What are you talking about?"

There was nothing subtle about Alfreda. Her powers of divination were strictly limited to those possessed by the Grand Order of Infants.

"Gorden Fleet is going to marry Juliet Tower next month."

"Wh-who told you?" Céleste quavered, sinking into one of the gilt chairs at one of the gilt tables where they served ices. Her heart felt as heavy and sodden as a wet clod of earth on a grave.

Alfreda grabbed a morning paper from the show case and thrust it into her hand.

"Here it tells all about it—and the pictures, too. I gotta wait on these wimmin, C'leste."

Through the blur of print, certain flattering sentences finally penetrated Céleste's understanding. Gradually her brain cleared, and she read it all—slowly and laboriously.

Gorden Fleet's engagement was definitely announced to the wealthy and beautiful Miss Tower, of New York and Paris. There was a long description of her charms and financial assets. There was a longer description of Fleet and the Fleet family. There were also various stock photographs of each that the newspapers kept on hand.

Céleste read it all carefully. She felt no pangs of jealousy against the beautiful Miss Tower; only a deadly dullness seemed to infold her, and a lethargy crept through her limbs.

After a while she got to her feet and started out into the open. Alfreda called after her from behind the shining counter and the rows of colored confectionery:

"Wait a minute, Céleste; I'll soon be through here. I want to ask you about Kemp. He just called up before you came in, and he wants us to take the boat and go to Coney to-night. What'll I tell him?"

Céleste paused and looked at her as if she had not understood.

"That'll be all right, Alfreda," she said, and went on out.

Alfreda stuck a bunch of artificial lilies of the valley on top of the box of candy she was making up for a customer and patted a green bow smoothly into place.

"Céleste answers a person like a bum fortune teller," she complained to the girl who was polishing the brass trimmings on the electric-light showers. "I'll bet if it had been Gorden Fleet wanted her to go to Coney, she'd have heard me all right, all right."

Alfreda's expression showed that she was a born skeptic of absent-mindedness in all its various forms and phases.

Céleste left the candy shop sick at heart. The taste of ashes and the bitter waters of the fountain of renunciation were henceforth to be meat and drink to her. Her eyelids drooped leadenly over her aching eyes. Her brief romance was ended with an indecent suddenness. It had been a clever little joke of Fate's, a nightmare born of her own credulity, a chimera hatched out of champagne and moonlight. She idled a moment in front of the gaudy windows of the candy shop, gazing at its rose-and-gold magnificence unseeing. Like Napoleon after Waterloo, she wandered "the immense sleepwalker in a vanished dream."

A nausea seized her when she remembered she would have to go back and trim bonnets and sell hats in the shop of Madame Louise. Subconsciously she followed the suave tones of madame selling a poke bonnet with strings that tied under the chin to a stout woman of forty who was ob-

viously intended by nature for almost any other style of headgear. Of course, she did not have to go back to madame's at all. There was Felix—always Felix. She could hear, in fancy, his foggy tones persuading her. They would marry and live in the suburbs. They would have a living room done in turkey-red and a picture of Bismarck over the fireplace and a cow on a leash in the front yard.

As she turned away from the window, a beggar, powder-stained in face and time-stained in garments, besought her to buy from his tray of pencils. Mechanically she gave the fellow a coin and told him to keep his pencils. As she spoke, she glanced across the street at madame's. And what she saw there turned the beggar to a prince and snapped the solar systems back into running order.

A long, rakish, green motor car was drawing up at madame's curb—what Alfreda would have described as "a regular bear-cat of a car." In the front seat, at the wheel, sat Gorden Fleet, an interesting-looking piece of court-plaster gummed along one side of his head.

Céleste dived across the street with the agility of the cat and newsy familiarity. She came near being run down between a motor bus and an extravagant equipage of four horses with postilions. She gained the side of the car in which Fleet sat, with shining eyes and little or no breath. When he saw her, he leaped out and, without a word, fairly lifted her into the car. Then he climbed in over her and started the machine.

"Looks like an abduction, pure and simple, doesn't it, Céleste?" he queried joyfully. "It's the only way, though. You're such an elusive little creature that I don't care to let you out of my sight again until we are married."

He put on the brakes and slowed up for a traffic policeman's raised glove.

"I'll wager you wondered why I didn't show up this morning at your home, as we had agreed, Céleste. Didn't you, now, and weren't you saying all manner of things about me? Well, after I left you Saturday night, I had a slight accident—collided with a piano truck and dumped myself out on my head. My fault—speeding, of course! They took me to the Municipal Hospital and put me to bed. Day and night nurse, hot baths and rubs, broth and Bible reading—you would have thought I was suffering from smallpox at the very least, instead of from a few scalp scratches.

"I explained the situation to the doctors and nurses over and over, but the best I could get out of them was a 'Sh-sh! Don't excite yourself, now.' This morning, when the nurse was out of the room, I slipped one of the attendants five dollars, and he brought me my clothes, and I beat it out of the window to town. I always knew that a hospital staff had plenty of nerve—vivisecting and all that sort of thing—but I never thought they would interfere with a man who was due at his own wedding." He turned his head a moment and gazed fondly at Céleste.

"Have you seen the morning papers?" quavered that young lady.

"Isn't that the limit?" heatedly queried Fleet. "Some fresh cub of a reporter's work. Julie's mother will be furious—what with her engagement to that French count all but consummated and so on. Jule herself will be weeping all over the place. 'When in doubt, weep,' always was Julie's motto."

"And you don't care for her, dear?" whispered Céleste.

Fleet narrowly averted side-swiping a yellow taxi with his mud guard.

"The way I care for you doesn't leave any room for anybody else, Céleste. Besides, if you only knew how sick I am of the women of Julie's type. Girl dolls, every one of them—they

think there is nothing to do in the world but spend money and change gowns. Their brains are like dried beans rattling around in their pretty pates. Show one of them the tomb of Napoleon, and she would reply: 'Oh, is he dead? I thought he was still in the automobile business.' But this is not what I want to talk about, Céleste. Why should I waste breath on all these women when I have you to talk about? When I am soon going to possess that rarest of all treasures nowadays—a wife who is going to be really, really true to me and love only, only me. Aren't you, Céleste?"

Céleste's adoring eyes answered for her. She was too happy to speak.

"We are now headed toward City Hall," continued Fleet. "I think we will be married there at once, and save time. You don't happen to have a couple of friends who would be willing to act as witnesses on this auspicious occasion, do you, Céleste?"

"There is Alfreda Shipley—the manager of the Grecian Palace Candy Shop—and Joe Elsenberger, the proprietor."

"Joe Elsenberger? I happen to know him. He leases his building from me. I'll not have him kissing my wife after the ceremony and watch him get away with it."

"And then Alfreda will be sure to want us to start the honeymoon with a trip to Coney. She's so fond of Coney."

"I'll tell you what we'll do, Céleste. We're almost at the City Hall, and we can't waste any more time. Let's get the janitor to witness it."

They drove up to the curb, and Fleet helped her out.

"I think that will be lovely, Gorden. You arrange things wonderfully."

At which remark, the son of Venus, who was whittling arrows on Mount Olympus, giggled rapturously and drooped one eyelid the tiniest fraction of an inch.





# PLAYS AND PLAYERS BY ALAN DALE

**N**OTHING succeeds on the stage as surely as a penitential heroine—except, perhaps, a pestilential one! The butterfly girl with the sunshiny outlook is of so little interest that playwrights cannot afford to waste good powder and shot upon her. She is relegated to the infernal regions of farce or to the spectacular ignominy of musical comedy.

The penitential heroine, acutely sorry for herself, is nearly always with us. We get her in gusts, as it were, and it is only when she has raged persistently for a couple of seasons or so that she retires temporarily. When she does retire, it is because she has been so plentiful that we have actually started to burlesque her, to laugh at her whimsical idiosyncrasies. When that happens, she is shelved for a time, to reappear as penitential and as undaunted as ever.

You could put me in a theater, bar the name of the playwright from my ken, and see to it that no incriminating program reached me, and I'll wager you that I could spot the penitential heroine the first moment she appeared on the stage, though her penance be withheld throughout the first act. I am no heroine reader, but long experience has familiarized me with the Penitential One.

Before her penance sets in, you might expect that she would be a bit cheer-

ful and—er—natural, but she never is. I know her by that brooding look she wears so conspicuously. She is thinking of her "big scene" later on. Her haunting eyes are dwelling upon her emotional future. There is no reason on earth why she shouldn't be quite comfortable and perfectly at her ease, but she is going to suffer, and suffering heroines, like coming events, cast their shadows before. There is something repressed about her—something ridiculously tense. She bears the look of the hunted antelope, brought to bay—whatever that is. If she had to say, "Please pass me the mustard," she would gaze into vacancy, as if she dreaded that mustard—as if it contained some secret sorrow. I am never mistaken in the penitential heroine. She is so utterly illogical, and so ludicrously untrue to life. She never varies. I might even be blindfolded and detect her, for the very tones of her voice give her away.

Two penitential heroines in two current successes, "Common Clay" and "The House of Glass," contain really excellent instances of all this. The heroine of the former is a most miserable creature, the misery being embroidered all over her demeanor, and she is of course extremely sorry for herself. They all are. They are so smeared with sympathy for their own freckled lives that it is a marvel the audiences can find any left for their own use. Mr. Cleves Kinkad, who

wrote "Common Clay," has plied his tearful heroine with volumes of the kind of speeches that these poor, chastened creatures love to utter, and she is most penitentially chatty. You are perfectly sure, after having watched her for a few minutes, that there will be some tragedy in her vicinity before the play ends.

And of course there is. There is no need to describe it, because it is nearly always the same. In the "big" courtroom scene that should end the play—but doesn't—her "past" is being dragged from her in a highly dramatic manner when the lawyer opposing her suddenly learns that the poor, suffering girl is none other than his own daughter. He is very rich, of course, as all nice men are on the stage, and her future is assured. She ends in really atrocious happiness; and, not content with that, the playwright brings her forward, in a funny little epilogue, as a "famous prima donna"—not unlike our old friend Magda. You cannot resist the inference that if a girl once goes wrong—or shall we make it twice?—she becomes wonderfully fitted for grand opera or a concert tour. I cannot for the life of me think why wronged heroines should make such famous prime donne. I don't think it a bit kind to grand opera.

The penitential heroine of "Common Clay" never has a happy moment. Even when she is engaged as a "maid," her unsavory "past" is trotted out. She is a reversion to the old Pinero drama of "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray" and "The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith" style, for, as I said before, the "lady with a past" never dies; she merely takes a holiday or lies low, waiting for the turn of the tide that will wash her back to the footlights.

In "The House of Glass," by Max Marcin, the penitential heroine has been sent to prison for a crime of which she was innocent. That makes

no difference at all in her demeanor. You know from the very first that she is booked for a long tour of agony, always pursued by relentless right doers who, in plays of this sort, are much more nefarious than wrong doers. You look at your program, and you see: "Eight years later," and *you know!* If you don't know, you have been hopelessly addicted to the "movies," which furnish the greatest excuse in the world for not knowing anything.

She has married, and the shadow of her past is "o'er her"—I might almost say "over her." The foolish little thing hasn't said a word to her husband, although she is perfectly innocent, and that is what always "gets" me! A woman in real life grows to be quite confidential with her own husband in time. This is inevitable. In the early honeymoon, she may conceal from him her age, or the fact that she dyes her hair; but as time goes on, she becomes callous. Yet in "The House of Glass" the penitential heroine says ne'er a word. She is very much interested in ameliorating the condition of prisoners, and she is always thinking of the dreadful time she once enjoyed—yes, I mean *enjoyed*, for if penitential heroines do not enjoy their tragedies, then I'm no judge of enjoyment. To me, they always seem to gloat over them greedily.

She is silent until the stage has been set for a big scene, and the characters are all carefully arranged for the sensational "confession." Then—the fireworks! The penitential heroine sends up rockets, the stage is adorned with "set pieces," and a veritable Fourth of July of agony is enacted. In the very end, she is released from her "parole" by the governor of the State of New York—and by that time you are much more interested in the State of New York than you are in that of the heroine—and the tangle is straightened out. The governor is a very nice old party,

who appears only in the last act, the sort of rôle I should adore if I were an actor. To come on at the very end, fresh and vigorous, among all the tired and penitential ones, and with a few well-selected words send them all home to bed, must be an enviable mission.

"Common Clay" and "The House of Glass" have brought the penitential heroine back from a long vacation. The fact that both plays had most astute managers as sponsors—the former being produced by Mr. A. H. Woods, and the latter by the Messrs. Cohan and Harris—will probably be the excuse for a new invasion of just that sort of play. I think it is a bit of a mistake to allow actresses addicted to penitential heroines to appear in these plays. Miss Mary Ryan, in "The House of Glass," was a satisfactory selection; but Miss Jane Cowl, in "Common Clay," came to us full of the woe that she diffused in "Within the Law." We expected from her quite as much as we got, and I am perfectly sure that as long as women have grievances—which will be until this sometimes unhappy sphere drops into space—Miss Cowl will portray them for us. She loves her misery, and she has such beautiful, haunting eyes with a past in each of them!

For the sufferings of the luckless men in these plays nobody cares a hang, yet surely in "The House of Glass" the poor chap who married that silly, silent, penitential heroine deserved a little commiseration; and one or two characters in "Common Clay" we might have pitied if we had been allowed to do so. Man is always the betrayer, you see, and one of these days some ambitious playwright will dare to show us his rebellion. Of course it would be a very risky thing to do, and I would suggest that some brave, altruistic woman take up his cudgels and paint for us a heroine who is betrayed in name only while the so-called betrayer is the unfortunate victim. The novelty of that sort

of thing would fill any theater, and women who are pampered by playwrights and fitted up with most luxurious pasts, all lending themselves to dramatic scenes, would gradually realize that they cannot monopolize all the spectacular suffering of the drama.

Even Sarah Bernhardt rebelled once at the constant stream of penitential heroines that flooded her career.

"Some day," she said, "I want to produce a great novelty. I am anxious to appear as a perfectly good woman—all that there is of most respectable and dignified—with a husband and *only one* lover!"

The most irritating kind of penitential heroine is the "good" woman who is on the verge of going wrong and who never gets there, because she "loves her husband." That most annoying and voluble person is the central figure of a play by Charles Kenyon called "Husband and Wife." The play was at first announced as "A Married Mistress," but an alert management must have realized the folly of such an unconventional title for such an alarmingly conventional play.

The heroine feels that she is neglected by one of those "American husbands" so popular in fiction and on the stage. His "business" distracts his attention, and he leaves her to the platonic mercies of another. Of course he loves her! That is one of the eccentricities of the "American husband"; he always loves his wife, but is careful not to let her know it. I may add that she is equally careful *not* to know it. When you perceive a husband and a wife each loving the other—as you invariably do in this kind of play—and each absurd enough to hide the incriminating fact, all you can do is to give your sense of humor a chance. Just as she is about to elope—and make a past for herself to wear as a genuinely penitential heroine—and just as he is on the verge of being arrested for

embezzlement—a most unsympathetic crime, good for men only—they discover that they love each other.

The really ludicrous episode occurs—and this is good farce—when the nearly lover in the case subscribes a large sum of money to a fund destined to lift the husband from his pecuniary difficulties. Nobody but a serenely serious person like Mr. Kenyon could invent an idea as humorous as that. Paris in its most fantastic mood could scarcely think of anything better. There we sat, sophisticated adults—I like that better than “jaded theatergoers”—watching the arms of the husband close around the convulsed form of the penitential wife, while the man who was about to elope with her puts up the money for this marital felicity. The pathos of bathos!

They say abroad that we are an exceedingly sentimental people. Really we must be that and more! The sad accusation rings true when you think of this scene, offered in the sincerity born of ignorance, as a happy termination to a story of domestic tribulation. Abroad, the deceived husband is a joke. Here, the lover gives him back his wife plus a neat little sum of money with which he can set things right; and we are supposed to exclaim: “How beeyoo-ti-ful!” Mr. Kenyon should devote his attention to farce. If his farce be half as hilarious as his drama, he should be quite sure of seasons of success.

I love J. M. Barrie, even though he does now sport a title, just as if he were a “wealthy brewer” or a pickle manufacturer; but I am no fanatic, and when I saw his one-act play, “*Rosalind*,” with which Miss Marie Tempest succeeded her revival of “*The Duke of Killicranke*,” I was distinctly disappointed. We had all been told that Barrie was to shed a glorious effulgence upon that very “personal” topic known as middle age. The theme was really most allur-

ing. So many people are middle-aged nowadays, especially those who never suspect it. That period of life is looked upon with contempt by young people, and with pity by the old ones who have been there. Some of them insist that they are still there. What more fitting than that the fantastic Barrie should come to the rescue of the middle-aged ones and make them feel comfortable in their melancholy condition?

In “*Rosalind*,” Barrie showed us a middle-aged actress who played “young” parts, and we saw her resting in a country home and apparently enjoying her middle age. The idea was promising. Nearly everybody at the Lyceum Theater that night was middle-aged except the dramatic critics. But Barrie smashed his idea into smithereens with the conventions of the theater; for when the young lover who had known her in her stage life appeared, he failed to recognize her. When he heard the truth, he was fearfully discouraged; and at the very end Miss Tempest displayed herself in all her youthful make-up and you realized that Barrie’s invasion of middle age was nothing but a bluff, and that the dangerous theme was as badly off for a sponsor as ever.

Pinero, who also has a title, once devoted the greater part of a play to a discussion of the horror of being forty. The heroine was forty, the hero was more than forty, and they became engaged to each other as salvation from the misery of being attracted by youth to foolish marriages. The play had its day, but it is now forgotten. Pinero, at least, had the courage of his convictions; Barrie lacks even the convictions! He really might have made us all feel very cozy, and have put us on good terms with ourselves. If he had told us that nobody ever really does anything until middle age; that the charm of woman never sets in until she has reached middle age; that life

itself means nothing in early youth—appetizing lies of that ilk—I believe that “Rosalind” would have scored tremendously. There was even a chance to curry favor with the Tired Business Man.

The Barrie fanatics remind me of the Ibsen maniacs. They are so busy trying to read meanings into words that really have no significance that genuine issues elude them. If Ibsen says, “Oh!” they are perfectly sure that he means, “Bah!” And if Barrie says, “Bless you, my children!” they insist that this is very subtle and fantastic. It is really a case of give a dog a good name and hang him!

Exactly six years ago a very fashionable function was scare-headlined in our dailies, just as would have been the case if it had happened to-day, even with the war on. The war would have taken second place. I refer to the dedication of the New Theater by ex-Governor Hughes and Mr. Elihu Root. Never shall I forget the glory of that roseate occasion, and the speeches with which that ornate structure was professedly handed over to the people. The pee-pul!

“The establishment of this theater,” said Elihu Root, “founded by private munificence, imbued with public spirit, is in recognition of the fact that the rule which applies to all other arts applies also to the art of the acted drama, as the French learned more than two centuries ago in founding the *Comédie Française*.”

Ha! Ha! Ha! Only six years ago; and the New Theater, now blazoning itself forth as the Century, is acclaimed as “the only continental music-hall in America,” and devoted to a new musical entertainment, “conceived and staged” by Ned Wayburn and called “Town Topics.” On programs that were destined for “Art,” you may read: “To the left of the auditorium, as you face the stage on the Sixty-second Street side, is the English Tap Room”; and in the mezzanine circle you learn, from the same unerring authority, that there is “an English Ladies’ Bar and Restaurant.” Fie upon such English ladies! Men and women are unknown commodities in the program of the Century Theater. They are all “ladies and gentlemen”—and always with capital letters. So much for the prophetic vision of ex-Governor Hughes and Elihu Root.

Shall we be downhearted? No! The “Art” that the New Theater handed us was snob-riddled and unwelcome. It was an art lost in the frills and furbelows of “good form.” I am no advocate of “musical shows”—usually they bore me insistently—but I will admit that I enjoyed myself more at the sumptuous presentation of “Town Topics”—in spite of the English Tap Room and the English Ladies’ Bar and Restaurant (poor English ladies!)—than I did at the ceremonious and starchy productions of the New Theater. You can hit me for that, if you like.







# FOR BOOK LOVERS

**M**R. H. G. WELLS doubtless understood thoroughly his own purpose in writing "The Research Magnificent," published by the Macmillan Company, and executed it to his own satisfaction. But he would, we are sure, have better pleased his readers and admirers if he had given a fuller account of the practical consequences to himself of William Porphy Benham's theories of life.

It is another story, biographical in form, of the ideals that the hero set for himself. Aristocracy, in the broader sense of the word, is the state that Benham, even as a lad, seeks to realize, and he begins with his efforts to rid himself of his fears. This aim he pursues with relentless logic and never permits himself—as he thinks—to "strike sail to a fear." He is not so fortunate in his encounter with another handicap of his "aristocracy," the sex instinct, and in his meeting of this difficulty he shows pretty plainly that his fears are not wholly overcome, for he determines to escape the unpleasant results of a scrape with a woman by leaving England.

But it is in Benham's dealings with the girl that he finally marries that the book shows its greatest vitality, for he finds that his pursuit of "the aristocratic life" is incompatible with the traditional observance of the obligations imposed by the relation of husband and wife.

In spite of everything, however, he

sticks to his ideals, even in the face of final disaster.

The book inevitably raises the question in the reader's mind as to whether Mr. Wells meant to show the futility of all human idealism in his portrayal of Benham's failure at the end. Has the war, perhaps, made him pessimistic?



The evils of the English system of land tenure constitute the foundation upon which John Galsworthy has built his story, "The Freelands," published by Charles Scribner's Sons.

It is, we think, an unfortunate theme for Mr. Galsworthy, with his peculiar limitations as a novelist, to have selected. For it is a theme the distinctly human elements of which must be developed to the utmost if its fictional values are to be fully utilized. Characterization is of the last importance if a vital, living story is to be constructed out of the material offered by industrial or economic questions, and Mr. Galsworthy's characterization has always been his weak point, and, we suspect, always will be, for he has never shown a correct understanding of the psychology of his people.

The story that is woven into the English land question is the love story of Derek Freeland and his cousin Nedda. Both of them belong to the land-owning class, but he is stirred by the wrongs of the tenant farmers, being a born reformer, and she, though passionately

loyal to him, is unable always to understand him. Hence the usual course of true love.

There is a multitude of other characters and a sufficient divergence of views as to causes and remedies to keep things pretty well stirred up throughout the story.

The good things of the story are the descriptions of conditions under which the lower classes live and labor, but unfortunately such descriptions are not of the sort to claim the attention and interest of those who, in their reading, are seeking entertainment.



Gouverneur Morris' latest novel, "When My Ship Comes In," published by Charles Scribner's Sons, is, we infer, designed to expose the iniquities of theatrical managers.

We are unable to say, from personal experience, that such people as McKay Hedden really exist. There are many stories told, on and off Broadway, of managers who steal plays from manuscripts that are submitted to them, and there are plenty of credulous persons, in and out of the "profession," who believe them. In the majority of cases of plagiarism, however, that are successfully prosecuted in the courts, the playwrights rather than the managers appear to be the guilty ones.

For Mr. Morris it must needs be said that, in this book, as in all his stories, his undisguised purpose is to spin a good yarn. We have no recollection that he has ever forgotten himself so far as to write a novel or a short story with "a purpose." His themes may, as in this case, be more or less fanciful, but he keeps his story sane.

McKay Hedden takes Paul Henley's play; he casts Paul's fiancée, Silver Sands, for the heroine's rôle, while Paul is working and fighting to save his employer's Mexican mines from the

ravages of Mexican revolutions. Thus a situation is prepared for Henley's return to New York that has greater possibilities, so far as dramatic interest is concerned, than those he left behind him in Mexico. It would not be fair to disclose here what happened when Paul and Silver found out the imposition that Hedden had practiced upon both of them. But readers who know Mr. Morris' skill as a story-teller will assume it is worth their while to find out.



The theory that no man is altogether what he thinks himself to be, that circumstances have made of him something quite different from what he would have been under other conditions, is responsible for "The Real Man," by Francis Lynde, published by Charles Scribner's Sons.

It is explained by Debritt, a traveling salesman, to J. Montague Smith, the cashier of a bank in an inland city, by way of showing the latter how easily his prosperous life may be revolutionized by the sudden appearance of the Absolute Ego.

An introduction such as this prepares the reader for the catastrophe which, within twenty-four hours, transforms the impeccable cashier into a fugitive. Smith beats his way West on the railroads, stopping nowhere until he finds himself in a small town in the Rocky Mountains and secures employment with an irrigation company.

In this unfamiliar environment the "real man," otherwise the Absolute Ego, asserts himself. The company, organized and carried on by local capitalists, has projected and partially completed an elaborate irrigation plant, and its inexperienced managers have got into difficulties which they cannot handle because the railroad interests have started to make war upon them. The result is a financial battle, and J. Mon-

tague Smith, now plain John Smith, finds his banking knowledge useful.

He is no longer the traditional business man and the well-groomed, correct society devotee, but the primitive fighting man. The methods that were used to defeat him and the company, and the devices he invented to circumvent their enemies, the girl that had faith in him and curbed his savage instincts, these are used by Mr. Lynde with his customary skill to make a story full of action, coherency, and interest.



Miss Jean Webster vouches for the reality of the author of a book entitled "Me" and published anonymously by the Century Company. She also declares that she knows that the "main outlines" of the story rest upon facts.

It seems entirely justifiable, therefore, to speak of the book as autobiographical rather than as a work of fiction.

It purports to give the experiences, covering a year, of a young woman who starts out to earn her living by her pen. It begins with her departure from her home in Canada to take up newspaper work in a town in the West Indies, and ends with a journey to New York. Jamaica, Boston, Richmond, and Chicago are visited in succession, and each one is left behind because of the unwelcome attentions of some man—a fact that not unnaturally raises the question as to how Miss Jean Webster acquired her knowledge of the facts which she so emphatically affirms.

On the way from Richmond to Chicago, Nora Ascough, as the author calls herself, meets another man, named Hamilton, a Chicagoan, with whom she falls violently in love. Nothing of special moment comes of this at first, ex-

cept her acceptance from him of a loan of a hundred dollars.

A dramatic climax for the book is fortunately supplied by her discovery, not only that Hamilton is a married man, but that he has been engaged in a liaison with another woman because of which his wife has begun proceedings for a divorce.

There is nothing very unusual in the story, either in substance or treatment.



"Felix O'Day" is the title of a novel by the late F. Hopkinson Smith, just published by Charles Scribner's Sons. It is a story of New York, or rather of Fourth Avenue above Madison Square, of Greenwich Village, and of Gramercy Park. The Fourth Avenue that Mr. Smith describes, of the antique-furniture shops, small fruit stores, old-fashioned hotels, and corner groceries, has gone—it went almost overnight—but the others still remain.

Felix O'Day is an Irish gentleman who has come to New York seeking his wife, who has run away to America with another man, and, penniless and friendless, he finds help and sympathy among the people of "The Avenue." The proprietor of a secondhand furniture store gives him work, and an expressman's wife supplies a home.

The story itself is not especially striking. So far as plot and episode are concerned, it is simple, even commonplace, and would not merit much consideration were it not for the fact that Mr. Smith has succeeded, to a degree unusual even for him, in creating an atmosphere of warmth and color and reality such as to make both the characters and the story alive. The charm of the book is what makes it worth reading.

## Talks With Ainslee's Readers

IN this number you have the first large installment of Mrs. Baillie Reynolds' remarkable novel, "The Daughter Pays." You know the AINSLEE attitude toward serials. We never print one merely because it is good enough to publish. We insist upon its being too good not to publish. Don't you agree with us, now that you have read the first quarter of Mrs. Reynolds' story, that it truly fulfills this requirement? We shall be very much surprised if "The Daughter Pays" does not become one of the most-talked-of novels of the year. The January installment is, in our opinion, even more gripping than the present one.



FOR the January AINSLEE's, which is our holiday number, Marie Conway Oemler has written one of the most appealing Christmas stories it has been our good fortune to read. It has nothing to do with mawkish lovers who clear up their misunderstandings just as the bells of the old village church, ringing sweet and clear in the crisp, starlit night, proclaim Christmas morn; nor does it tell of the good, old, sentimental burglar who had meant to turn straight, but just had to pull this one more job because he couldn't bear to see little Jimmy go without his Christmas tree. No, in "Linden Goes Home," Mrs. Oemler has written a new Christmas story of real distinction.

William Almon Wolff, who wrote "Eben-ezer Timpson's Son" in this issue, contributes the January novelette. "Cursed by a Conscience!" is a sprightly and charming account of the troubles of an unsophisticated painter who suddenly finds himself the legal guardian of a lively and fascinating young

lady. Incidentally, if Mr. Wolff is half the realist he would have us believe him, it is certainly surprising to learn how difficult it is for a determined young man to get himself killed in New York without actually doing the deed himself.

Christmas time, sitting in the fitful light of a big wood fire—that's the proper setting for a good ghost story. AINSLEE's provides the story—"The Drummer of Gordonmuir," by Shane Leslie. It has to do with the great war, and is a fitting companion tale to the legend of the phantom archers of St. George, who are supposed to have reinforced the British at the battle of Mons, and stayed the onrushing Germans.

For the next of the "Stories of the Superwomen," Albert Payson Terhune has chosen Mary, Queen of Scots. Victor Rousseau's harebrained hero François at last finds the one great love of his explosive young life.

Dana Gatlin, Herman Whitaker, and Elmer Brown Mason are among the contributors of other stories well worth a place in "the magazine that entertains." Christmas poems are contributed by Charles Hanson Towne and Clinton Scollard.



SPEAKING of poetry, we trust that you have not overlooked "Art" in this issue, by Josephine Fetter Royle, the fourteen-year-old daughter of Edwin Milton Royle, who wrote "The Squaw Man." An adequate definition of art in its broadest sense is art in itself. We have never seen it more beautifully defined than in Miss Royle's closing line:

"For what is art but a speaking soul?"



# The three vital features of your Christmas Grafonola

For, of course, your new instrument will be a Columbia, if it is a question of musical quality—of certainty of lasting enjoyment. Judge the superiority of the Columbia Grafonola, first of all, upon its superb tone.

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Tone perfection depends fully as much upon the scientific exactness of the reproducing mechanism of the instrument itself as upon the original recording process. The perfected reproducer and tone-arm of the Columbia Grafonola is the crowning achievement in this branch of the art.

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Your Grafonola, equipped with the individual record ejectors, an exclusive Columbia feature, is ideal in its convenience. Your records are racked individually in velvet-lined slots that automatically clean them and protect them against breaking and scratching. A numbered push-button controls each record—a push of the button brings any record forward to be taken between the thumb and fingers.



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*This model Grafonola with individual Record Ejector, \$110*

# COLUMBIA

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## Always Welcome — Riz La Croix

The man who rolls his favorite tobacco in Riz La Croix takes pride in the fact that he uses the best cigarette "papers" the world produces. And his cigarettes have the fresh, mellow flavor and the rich fragrance of the tobacco, without a particle of "paper" taste or odor.

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For a test — light two pieces of cigarette papers, Riz La Croix and some ordinary brand.

Note how much more freely and evenly Riz La Croix burns, with but a faint trace of gray ash — no charring, no odor.

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**Safety**  
No. 12 1/2 S.  
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Regular  
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## **GET IN AT THE START**

The Publishers of the Popular Magazine announce  
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**H. DE VERE STACPOOLE**

Author of "The Pearl Fishers"

Under the General Title of

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The First Story in the Series being

**THE FORTUNATE ISLAND**

Beginning with the issue of Popular on the  
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You'll want this wonderful bargain. It's made to prove to you that the great volume of our business in all parts of the country, enables us to do better by you than any other Watch or Diamond House in the world. We don't need the money. That's why we make such liberal terms and give you all the credit you want, and add this—the most marvelous watch offer ever made. Think of it! 17 Ruby and Sapphire Jewels—a genuine 17 Jewel Elgin. Standard of the World. Endorsed by Government and Railway Officials. Factory tested to the second. Finely finished and fitted in a superb, plain polished or hand-engraved 25-year Gold case, and you'll never miss the money. We send this watch on the astounding terms of only

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Dept. 1790 Kansas City, Mo.

*The House That Sells More Elgin Watches Than Any Other Firm in the World.*

**Kansas City Bank  
Presidents Endorse  
HARRIS-GOAR CO.**

We take very great pleasure in recommending the Harris-Goar Jewelry Co., to the business public. The company has large financial resources with patrons everywhere throughout the United States. Mr. Harris and Mr. Goar are well and favorably known as men of energy and business integrity, and we believe them worthy of the fullest confidence of the public. (Signed)

J. R. DOMINICK, Pres.,  
Traders National Bank.  
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Dept. 1790

**KANSAS CITY, MO.**

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Lifts the years off your face. Restores a beautiful shape and regular, graceful outline to the face, cheeks and chin. Makes the face pleasing, youthful, natural.



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Makes the face younger, more pleasant, and natural—the way it used to be and should be *now*.

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Dr. Pratt is a graduate, registered Physician and Surgeon, who has chosen the Dermatological profession as a lifelong pursuit. He has specialized exclusively in the art of correcting the face and features for 20 consecutive years. He has enjoyed an extensive patronage from all parts of the world and has proven what the scientifically trained mind and hand can do for the face and features.

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There's something mighty refreshing in the sight of a breezy young chap with good-nature written all over him jauntily "rolling his own" with "Bull" Durham. He likes "Bull" because it has a snap and sparkle in keeping with his own youthful spirits. He has learned that a cigarette so full of vitality and vim and equally fresh and fragrant cannot be obtained in any other way. There's hustle and vigor in every ounce of "Bull".

# GENUINE "BULL" DURHAM SMOKING TOBACCO

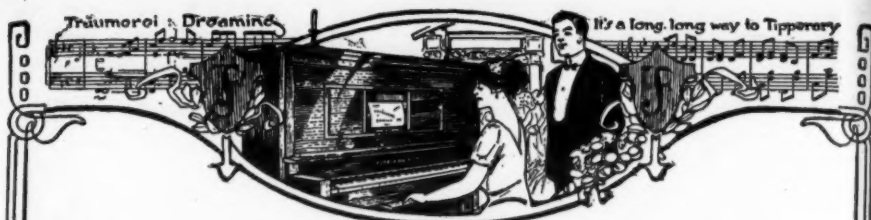
When you roll "Bull" Durham into a cigarette you have the unique smoke of the world. Made of the choicest "bright" Virginia-North Carolina leaf, it is the last word in tobacco quality.

Its mild, mellow flavor and rich aroma are found in no other tobacco. It gives supreme satisfaction and wholesome, lasting enjoyment as no other tobacco can.

That is why "Bull" is the favorite smoke of millions the world over, and has been for three generations.

THE AMERICAN TOBACCO COMPANY





## The Jesse French & Sons Player-Piano Satisfies all Tastes

Tastes vary widely in music. The fancies of one family may run all the way from Classics to Ragtime.

Usually a pianist is trained to play one type of piece—through preference as a rule. Thus half the joy of music is shut out of the home.

When there is a Jesse French & Sons Player-Piano in the home each member of the family can play the pieces he or she likes best.

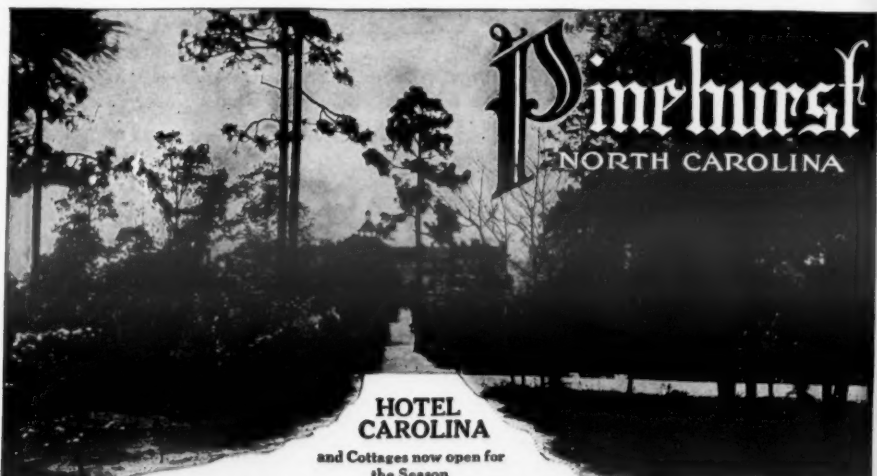
Very easy to operate; expression controlled entirely by the player. Many features not found in other player-pianos.

Leading Piano Dealers represent us in all parts of the United States. Where we have no dealer we ship direct. Easy payments if desired, and liberal allowances on old pianos.

Our Catalog tells the whole story. Write for it.

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"You've heard the name Jesse French since 1875"



**Golf** Eighteen-hole courses and a new nine-hole course. The fairways received special attention this year.

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**Livery** The large stable of saddle and driving horses is under the direct supervision of the General Office.

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Through Pullman service from New York via Seaboard Air Line Railway. Only one night from New York, Boston, Cleveland, Pittsburgh and Cincinnati.

No consumptives received at Pinehurst. Full information on request.

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Sole Agents for United States.

# 7 Cents a Day Buys This Standard Visible Oliver Typewriter



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## Trial Order Coupon

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Send me by express a No. 5 Oliver Typewriter on approval. I will leave \$3.50 with the express agent when I get the machine, the same to be returned to me in full if I return the typewriter within 10 days. If I keep it, the \$3.50 will apply on the purchase price of \$38.50, and I will pay the balance of \$35 in 12 consecutive monthly payments of \$2.92 each, commencing 1 month from delivery, title to the typewriter to remain in you until it is totally paid for.

Name.....Address.....

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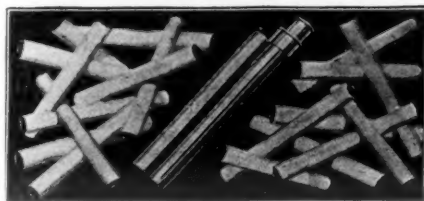
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89 SEVENTH AVENUE

**CELESTINS**  
**VICHY**  
 (FRENCH REPUBLIC PROPERTY)  
**Natural Alkaline Water**

For 50 years the standard Mineral Water for the relief of Sour Stomach, Indigestion and Uric Acid.



ASK YOUR PHYSICIAN:  Bottled at the Springs



YOU CAN MAKE CIGARETTES LIKE THESE  
 A Practical Novelty for Cigarette Smokers  
**TURKO CIGARETTE ROLLER**  
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 USEFUL SUBJECTS 10c. EACH

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"Can take a pound a day off a patient, or put it on. Other systems may temporarily alleviate, but this is sure and permanent."—N. Y. Sun, Aug., 1891. Send for lecture: "Great Subject of Fat."

No Dieting. No Hard Work.  
**DR. JOHN WILSON GIBBS' TREATMENT FOR THE PERMANENT REDUCTION OF OBESITY**  
 Harmless and Positive. No Failure. Your reduction is assured—reduce to stay. One month's treatment \$25.00. Mail or office, 1370 Broadway, New York. A PERMANENT REDUCTION GUARANTEED.  
 "Is positive and permanent."—N. Y. Herald, July 9, 1893.  
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The *Extra-Thin* Watch



\$17.50 to \$100.00

This purple ribbon makes you doubly certain of the quality of your Christmas gift.

The model shown here is an Extra-thin, 12-size Gentleman's South Bend "Chesterfield." It comes in a beautiful, leather-covered case, and is an ideal holiday gift.

The unerring time-telling qualities of this watch, its slender, shapely symmetry, its perfect and elegant finish will arouse your pride every time you consult it. And you can get a "Chesterfield" for as little as \$17.50. Other models, \$22.50 to \$100.

THE **South Bend**  
**Chesterfield**

Built and sold on merit—not tradition. An honest watch, reliable and sturdy in construction. All movements and cases fully guaranteed.

See Your Jeweler—he has or can get South Bend Watches.

Send for 68-page Catalog

Illustrated in color, showing all the "Chesterfield" series, and also the Studebaker Railroad grades, the Ladies' Dainty models and many others.

South Bend Watch Co.  
 1312 Studebaker Street  
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PROVEN IN ICE  
 KEEPS PERFECT TIME



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## Bud Cigarettes

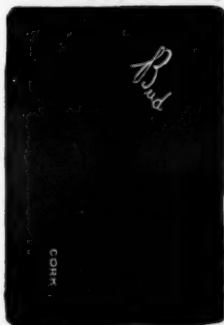
Plain or Cork Tip. Made of Selected Pure Turkish Tobacco, with a distinctive blend which is appreciated by smokers of discrimination and taste. 50 Bud Cigarettes securely packed in Mahogany Wood Boxes, with Brass Hinges and Spring Catch. Send us \$1.00 for box of 50. Sent postpaid to any address; you'll be glad to smoke 'em.

The Bud Cigarette Co., 2 Rector St., N. Y. City

If you do not care to send for the mahogany box of 50, ask your dealer for case of ten. This is the greatest novelty box in the cigarette business. The box will make a hit with you, but the cigarettes will make you want them always.

**20¢**

the case—plain or cork tip.



## YOU HAVE A BEAUTIFUL FACE

But Your Nose ?



Before



After



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in this issue

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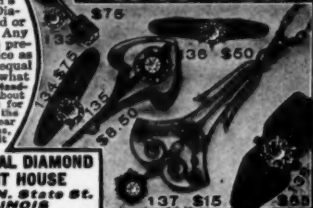
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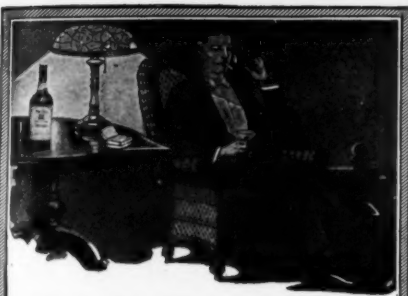
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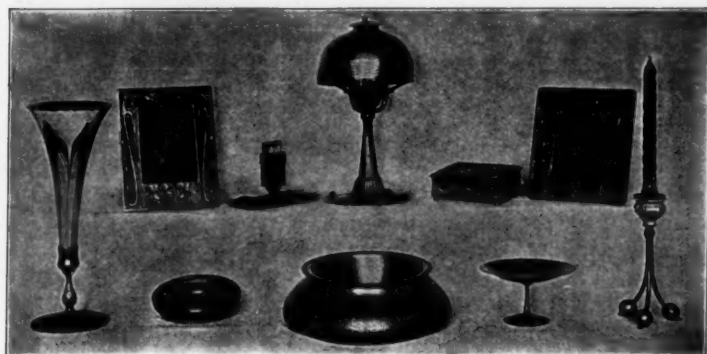
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